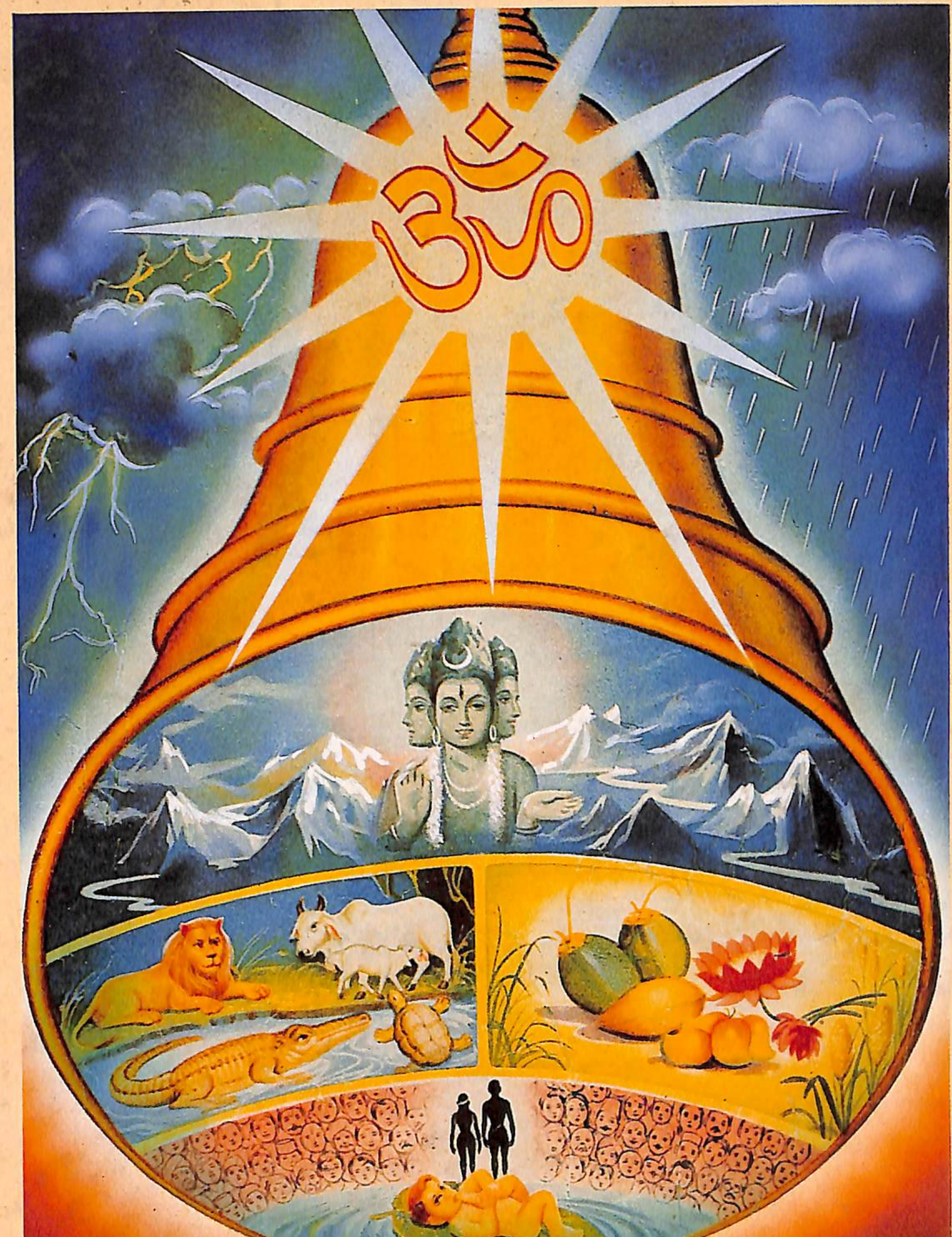


OUR HERITAGE

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INTRODUCTION

Hinduism is by far the most ancient known to the world as *Sanathana Dharma* which is a way of life. It is a religion which gets its guidance from the *Vedas* and allied sciences. *Agama Sastra* is one among them. The *Bhagavat Geeta* preached by Lord Krishna suggests various paths to reach the ultimate reality — That God is one. Everywhere in the world, man, to whichever religion he may belong, looked to a prophet or religious symbol to concentrate upon.

The *advaita* philosophy expounded by Adi Sankara says there is only one supreme being and all of us are part of the same. The Vedas proclaim that God is one — people call Him by different names. The Bhakti cult preached by various saints say *namasmaran* is the easiest way of reaching Him. The Hindu sees GOD in the form the devotee likes most. He keeps this figure in his mental image to concentrate upon. The easiest method of concentration is to think of God as he sees his relatives and friends. That is how God was visualised as one with consort, children, etc. The *Avatars* like Nrisimha, Rama & Krishna also added to his religious fervour and his eagarness to see enlightenment through devotion to the Lord. In this process, our temples are standing monuments of our great religion and culture. Researchers have found that our religion was spread over various parts of the world and has left its mark everywhere. The religions, that have come up subsequently dealt with only one or other aspects of Hinduism. This *Sanatana Dharma* based on the eternal Vedas, which faced many upheavals for several centuries could withstand the onslaught only because of its innate strength. Hinduism is acclaimed as a real remedy for many of the ills that the world is facing to-day. The temples stand as institutions to forge cultural, spiritual. and religious uplift. The temples were and are places where man learnt about himself, learnt various arts like music, dance and educated himself with all the sciences. This volume is intended to bring to the reader by presenting various manifestations of the same Supreme Being installed in various temples, the significance of such temples and how they help man-kind in the betterment.

An important factor almost universally accepted is faith in a Divine Power shaping the destiny of man-kind. According to Hindus this divine power is manifested in centres which are the bastions of Divine Force — i.e. temples and sanctified *Kshetras* of worship. *Agama Sastras* which derive their strength from the Vedas and lay down the rules relating to worship in temples, their maintenance and disciplines to be observed by devotees.

There are thousands of temples in India. — Every village has a place of worship. It would therefore be a gigantic task to present the Hindu temples to the reader in one volume. There are many books available on temples.. Every temple has its own Sthala Purana. What we have attempted here is only a glimpse of the universe.

OUR HERITAGE

The Vedas, Dharma Sastras and cosmic moral order are the fountain sources and roots of Dharma.

वेदोखिलो धर्ममूलं

The Universe rests on Dharma, a way of life ordained on humans.

धर्मो विश्वस्य जगतः प्रतिष्टः

Our Heritage and Culture is based on the people leading a Dharmic life, based on everlasting moral values designed to ensure cosmic harmony. This is known as Dharma, — a unique word, not known to any other religion or cult prevailing in any part of the globe.

श्रुतिः स्मृति सदाचारः स्वस्यच प्रियमात्मनः

संयक्‌ संकल्पजः कामो धर्ममूलमिंदं स्मृतं ।।

Another important factor almost universally accepted, is faith in a Divine Power shaping the destiny of mankind. This is manifested in centres which are the bastions of Divine Power (Temples) and sanctified places (Kshetras) of worship, which are preserved by following the rules of Agamas (Ceremonial law) relating to Temples, in maintaining Temple worship and by devotees observing the ordained disciplines while resoring to worship.

Temples are of four kinds:

1. Swayam Vyaktham — are kshetras where the Divine Power, of its own accord, manifested itself to serve as centres where people can worship the Divine.
2. Arisham — are centres where Rishis did intense tapasyas and invoked the Divine to be present there for all time to come, to enable people to worship.
3. Daivatham — are places where Devas did penance on earth, to expiate for their sins and in response to which the divine power manifested itself to remain for all time to come, to enable people to worship.
4. Manusham — are those founded by people.

In the first three instances the Temple is the place where Divine Power manifest s itself. Later, kings, noble men and the devout made the constructions and massive structures like Gopurams according to Agamas, and Silpa Sastras, (the rules governing temple worship and iconography of Temples).

In the fourth category once the deity is installed after performance of the rituals mentioned in the Agamas, Divine Power (God) descends. Here also the construction of temples is according to Agamas and Silpa Sastras (Iconography of Temples).

Construction of temples are part of the Poortha acts, mentioned in the Dharma Sastras, which are believed to assist the journey of the soul after death. Temple, in the popular parlance, includes the construction also.

SHANMATHA

The *Vedas* proclaim that all beings are made up of five elements — Earth *(Prithvi)*, Water *(Apaha)*, Fire *(Tejas)*, Air *(Vayu)*, Ether *(Aakaasa)*. These elements are part of the Supreme. Rishis, by their intense tapasya visualized the existence of one Supreme being and the 5 elements which we call nature. These rishis known as *Mantra Dhrashtas* (Seers of the mantras) were able to grasp the sound vibrations already existing and gave it to posterity as *Vedas*. They were not inventors or creators of the *Vedas*. Just as the law of gravity was there even before Newton found it, these *mantras* or sound vibrations were already existing long before the Rishis grasped them.

Adi Sankara whose *Advaita* philosophy has found universal acceptance preached that there is only one Supreme being and we are all part of the same. But to reach this goal, one has to pass through various stages. He therefore composed *Slokas* (poems) on various deities worshipped by Hindus. He established the *Shanmatha,* the six aspects or the six deities appealing and conducive to the well being of humanity.

Ganapatyam – Ganapathi the Lord who removes all obstacles in one's path. Temples have been constructed for Lord Ganapathi throughout the country. In many places it has no roof and is found to have been installed just under a tree on the banks of a river or a holy tank, accessible to His devotees.

Saivam deals with the worship of Lord Siva while his consort is worshipped as Sakti i.e. *Saktam*. Without *Sakti* there is no *Siva*. Siva means *Shanti* or *Peace*.

Vaishnavam is the cult of worshipping Lord *Vishnu* who, along with his consort *Lakshmi*, the giver of wealth and fortune, protects and preserves the world.

Kaumaram – *Lord Subramanya* or *Kumaran* is worshipped as an embodiment of Sakti and Siva — protecting all beings in the universe.

Sauram is the cult where Sun or *Surya* is worshipped. Surya is an embodiment of power, causing rain, protecting health of all and help the growth of vegetation etc.

Since the human body is made of *Pancha boothas,* the Hindus worshipped these five elements in the form of Lord Siva at different places known as *Panchalinga Kshetras.*

Since life is more important for enabling the other elements to be perfect, they worshipped Siva as Jyotir Linga and among temples dedicated to Lord Siva, we have twelve important *kshetras* known as *Jyotirlinga Kshetras.*

Vishnu as the protector undertook various *avataras* and there are a number of temples dedicated to Him representing his various *avatars*. The Hindus believe that every village or town should have its own temple. H. H. Chandrashekara Saraswati Swamiji, one of the greatest saints living amongst us, pointed out that in each street, at one end, there will be a temple for Lord Siva with temples for other deities like 'Ganapati, Kumaran, Sakti, Navagrahas etc., there will be another temple at the other end for *Vishnu*.

There are ancient sayings that 'one should not live in a place where there is no temple or Temple worship is very good for one's well being.

We hope this volume containing the pictures of the *Murthis* in some of the important temples in India will help the devotee to understand our religion and arouse in him the thirst for knowing more and more of our culture.

GANAPATYAM

The worship of Ganapati *(Ganapatyam)* as a remover of all impediments, is one of the six forms of worships *(Shanmatha)* established by Adi Sankara.

Ganapati is the primordial deity in Ganapatyam: Temples dedicated to *Ganapati* according to Vastu texts, should find a separate place in the village layout, be it a Saivaite settlement or a Vaishnavite one. Ganesa also appears as a *Parivara Devata* in the temples of Siva or Vishnu. In the latter, he goes by the name *Tumbikkai Alwar.* Ganapati is also the primordial scribe, dedicated to writing the entire Mahabharata - at the dictate of Sage Vyasa. Ganapati images are portrayed either standing, seated, or dancing: *(Nrittya Ganapati). Vatapi Ganapati* is a popular deity in Tamil Nadu. Most of the Carnatic musical concerts begin with the song *Vatapi Ganapatim Bhaje.* Ganapati is essentially conceived mostly as a Brahmachari, but also with his consorts Siddi-Buddhi, or Vallabh. There are various forms of Ganapati. Among the Upanishads, the one named *Ganapati Upanishad* extols the greatness of the Ganapati cult. The worship of Ganapati is not only popular among the Hindus, but also among Buddhists. Ganapati worship is popular in far eastern countries like Indochina, Cambodia, Japan and other adjacent countries.

Ganapati Pooja is a precondition for the performance of any religious function or rite,individualistic or congregational. Pooja for Vinayak is called *Vishavaksena Aradhanam,* among Vaishnavites.

Volumes can be written about Ganesh's birth, how he came to have the elephant head, why he holds a broken tusk in his hand, his powers of blessings. He is the personification of OM, the *Pranavamanthra.* Whatever may be the origin of the elephant head, the elephant is ever attractive and pleasing to children and elders. The pot bellied, elephant headed Ganesha has a rat for his vehicle and is the benevolent deity of the Hindu Pantheon.

In the South Indian villages there are many temples exclusively for the worship of Vinayaka but there is no village where he does not exist. You can see him on the river banks, under a banyan tree, without a temple, without a canopy - People worship the riverside Ganapathis - the first thing after their bath.

KARPAGA VINAYAGAR *Pillayar Patti - Tamil Nadu*

Karpaga Vinayagar of *Pillayarpatti* (one of the few instances where the village itself takes the name of Ganapati), is a soul stirring idol set in a temple of exquisite beauty.

The temple is about 15 kilometers from Karaikkudi, in Pasumpon Muthuramalingam District, Tamil Nadu.



KARPAGA VINAYAGAR

ASHTA VINAYAK

Ganapatyam has taken greater roots in Maharashtra and western parts of India. The propogation of Ganapathi worship by Lokmanya Tilak boosted the Ganapatyam and revived the spirit. There is a prescribed pilgrimage to the eight seats of Ganapathis in and around Pune - That is the life's ambition of every Ganapathi devotee. The eight seats are :

Sri GIRIJATMAJA, — *Lenyadri*

At Lenyadri, a short distance to the north of Pune, on the banks of the river Kukdi is a temple for the Lord, called Girijatmaja. The entire temple is carved out of stone with a Sabha Mandap in front. It is exciting to climb the 283 steps to have his darshan and puja.

Sri MORESHWAR — *Mayureshwar - Morgaon*

Morgaon, the village of peacocks,is in the Baramati district about 64 kms from Pune, on the banks of a river called Karha. The beautiful Ganesha is in a sitting posture, with diamond studded in his eyes and navel, with Siddhi-Buddhi on his side. Though rat is his normal vehicle has a peacock for his vehicle in this temple. Hence the name Mayureshwar (Moreshwar).

Sri BALLALESHWAR — *Pali*

40 Kms from Khopoli is the main shrine of Ballaleshwar at Pali, at the foot of a hill, on the top of which is Fort Sarasgod.

Sri CHINTAMANI — *Theur*

23 Kms away from Pune on the banks of the Mula-Mutha river is the Chintamani Vinayaka Temple, thronged by devotees. Chintamani Vinayaka is full of compassion and benevolence to his *Bhaktas*

Sri VIGNESWARA — *Ojhar*

The Vigneswara shrine at Ojhar is on the banks of the river Kukdi in Junnar Taluk, in Pune Dist. 8 Kms away from Junnar. The Sculpture of Vigneswara is beautifully carved out of granite, rubies studded in the eyes and a diamond on the forehead.

Sri SIDDHIVINAYAK — *Siddhatek*

13 Kms away from Daund, on the Bombay-Madras line, is the village Siddhatek, where the temple is located. It is said that the Ganapathi is *Swayambhu* and worshipped by Shri Vishnu. The Bhima river flows nearby in the vicinity of the temple.

Sri VARADA VINAYAK — *Mahad*

Nearer to PALI (about 40 Kms from Khopoli)on the Bombay-Pune highway is the small hamlet - where Ganesh is popular as Varada-giver of boons to the devotees. The idol was found in a pond and installed in the shrine there. As part of the 8 centres, he is visited by devotees in large numbers.

Sri MAHAGANAPATHI — *Ranjangaon*

50 Kms from Pune and about 16 Kms from Uruli, the Mahaganapathi temple at Ranjangaon attracts large crowds, built by the Peshwa Raja Madhavrao. The rays of the sun falls on the murthi exactly at noon.



Shree Maha Ganapati



Shree Chintamani



Shree Varad Vinayak



Shree Siddhi Vinayak

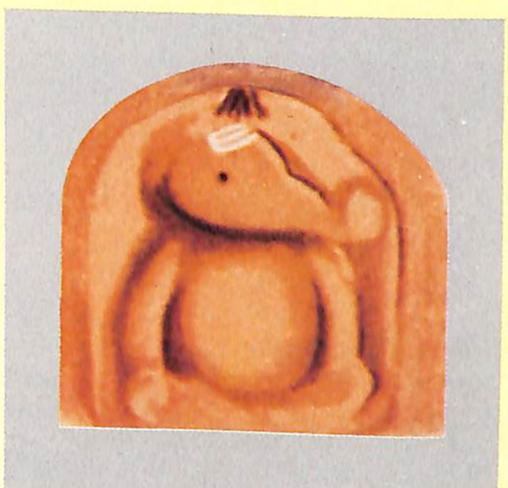
ASHTA VINAYAKA DARSHAN



Shree Moreshwar



Shree Vighneshar



Shree Girijatmak



Shree Ballaleshwar

KAUMARAM

It has already been propounded that Adi Sankara established the six cults of Hinduism and codified the regulations. *Kaumaram* is the cult whose premordial deity is Subramanya - the Commander-in-chief of the divine army.

He is more popular in Tamil speaking areas and he has his sway in the Far eastern countries of Borneo, Sumatra - Java and Ceylon.

His worship takes an ecstatic form and the devotees dance with *Kavadis* and forgets the whole world during such times. The God takes him over - temporarily.

The tradition is that Sage Agastya was the first to set up the worship of Lord Subramanya (or Muruga as he is known in Tamil) in South India. Another famous devotee of the Lord was the Tamil poet *Nakkirar* of the Sangam period (2nd century A.D.). In his Thirumurugatruppadai, he has selected temples from six places considered very sacred and named them *Arupadai-Veedus,* to indicate the bestowal of guidance to devotees by Lord Subramanya. Because they were six in number, these are called *Arupadai-Veedus,* and are known to have divine powers manifested differently.

Endorsement of six aspects of Lord *Shanmukha* can be found at these six *kshetras.*

They are :

1. Tirupparankundram *(Ullasam-Gaiety)*
2. Tiruchendur *(Nirakula-carefree nature)*
3. Pazhani *(Yoga-Penance)*
4. Swamimalai *(Idham-Benevolence)*
5. Tiruttani *(Sallabham-Interlude)*
6. Pazhamudircholai *(Marvel)*

TIRUPARANKUNDRAM - *Tamil Nadu*

Situated five miles west of Madurai, the temple is carved out of a rock. Tradition has it that Indra, the King of the Devas, gave his daughter Devasena in marriage to Subramanya in recognition of the services rendered by Him to Devas by destroying their enemy *Soorapadman.* Nakkirar, the renowned poet of Sangam period rendered the *Thirumurugatruppadai* in this *kshetra.*

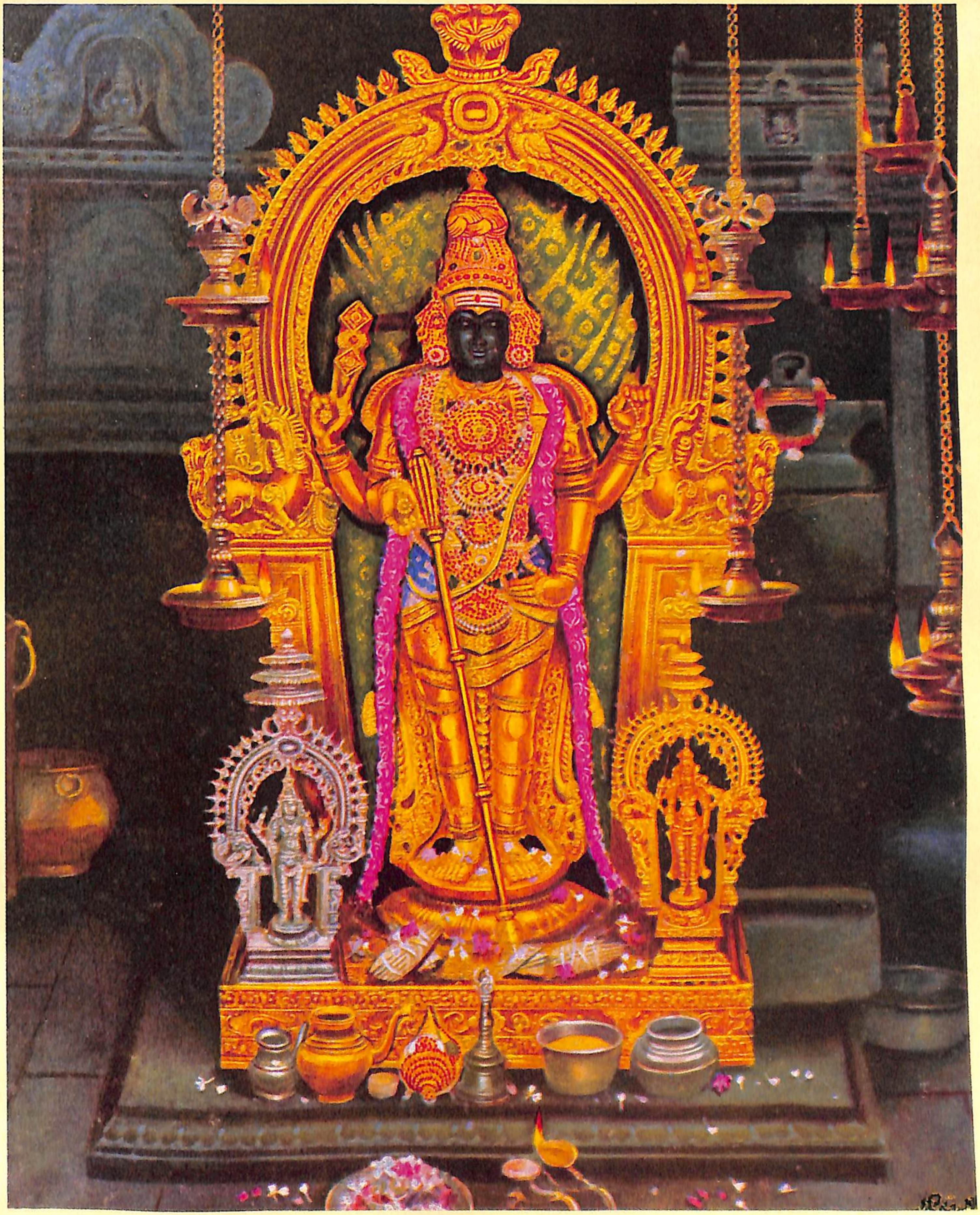


Sri SUBRAMANYA — *Tirupparankundram*

TIRUCHENDUR - *Tamil Nadu*

This temple on the seashore of the Bay of Bengal, at Tiruchendur 36 miles from Tirunelveli on the Madurai Road is situated in artistic surroundings. It is a monument for the victory of Subramanya over *Soorapadman,* having got a *Vel* (Gnanashakti - the Divine Spear—symbol of spiritual wisdom) for the *Soora Samharam.* This festival during *Skandashasti* in the month of November attracts a large number of devotees.

A five-year-old dumb boy became a poet (Kumaraguruparanar) due to the benign grace of God. Adi Sankara visited this temple and rendered the ecstatic *Subramania Bhujangam.*

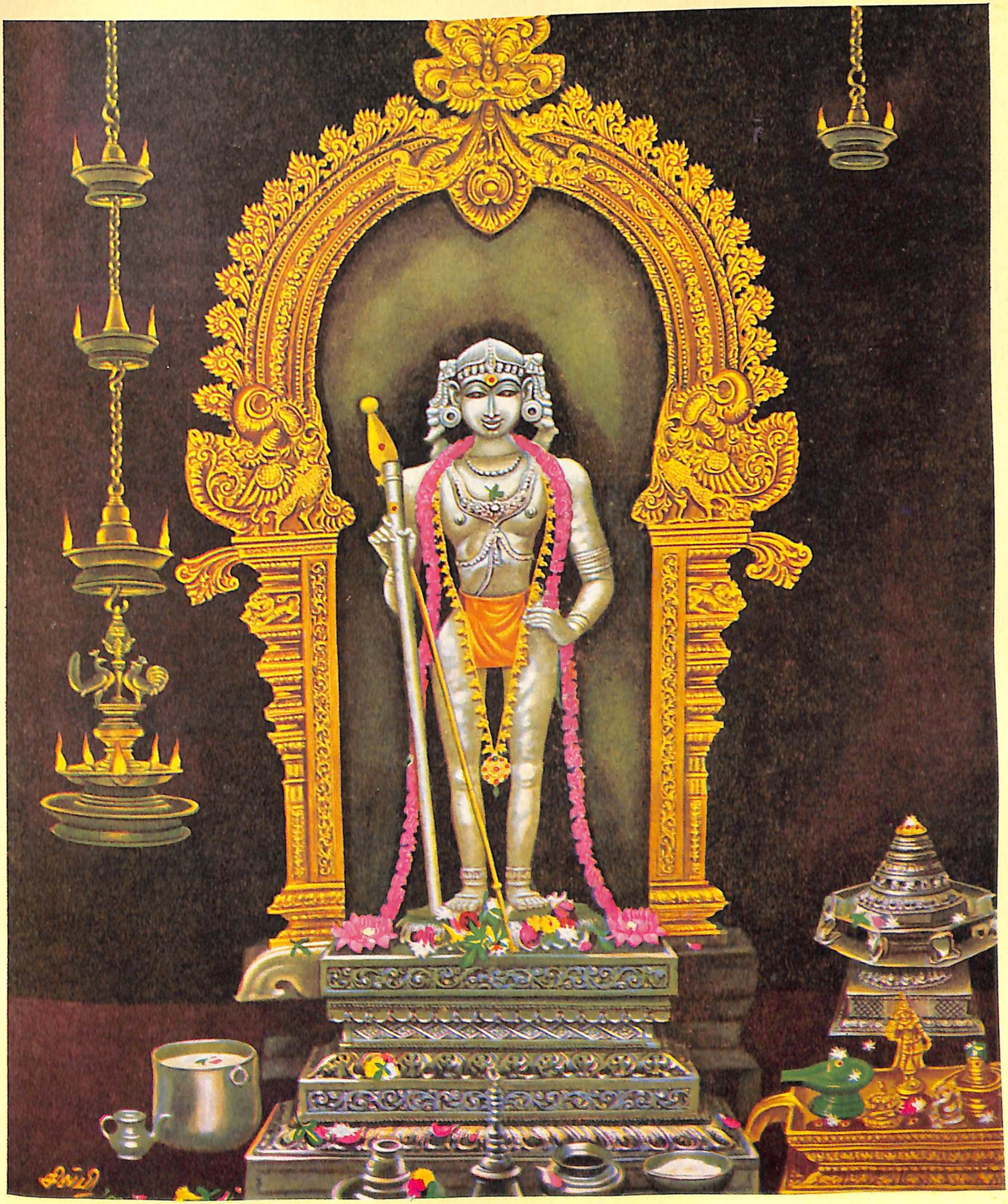


Sri SUBRAMANYA — *Tiruchendur*

TIRUVAVINANKUDI - *Pazhani —Tamil Nadu*

This is the third of the *Arupadai Veedu*. Subramanya is depicted as a saint, with tonsured head, in loin cloth, holding a mace (Danda) and is called *Dandayuthapani*. According to the legend, having lost to his brother Ganesa in a competition, he took to a life of seclusion. 25 miles off Dindugal Junction (Southern Railway) and situated amidst sylvan surroundings, the temple is on a high rock in the eastern Ghats. Siddhas have had realisation of the Divine there.

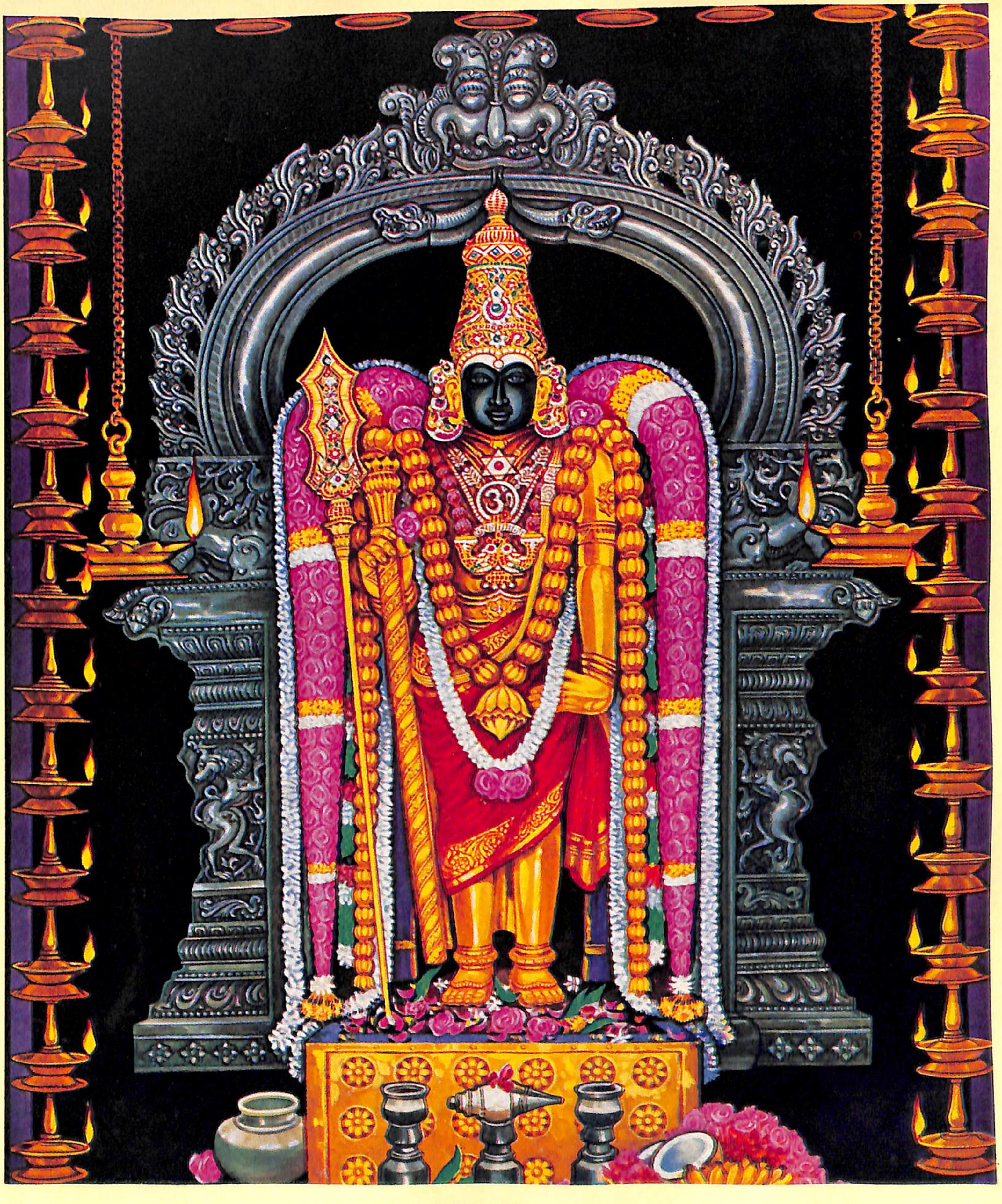
The idol is believed to be made out of nine medicinal herbs, the *Abhiseka Prasadam* which is said to have curative properties. It attracts large number of pilgrims during festivals in March (Panguni - Uthiram). Tiruvavinankudi temple is situated at the foothills of Pazhani Hills.



Sri DANDAYUTHAPANI — *Pazhani*

SWAMIMALAI - *Tamil Nadu*

It is situated on a small artificial hillock near Kumbakonam, Tanjore district. The six feet tall idol is known as Swaminatha, who is reputed to have initiated his father Siva into the power and meaning of OM the *Pranava Mantra*. The temple for Swaminatha, the son, is on a higher pedestal than that of the father (Siva).



Sri SWAMINATHA — *Swamimalai*

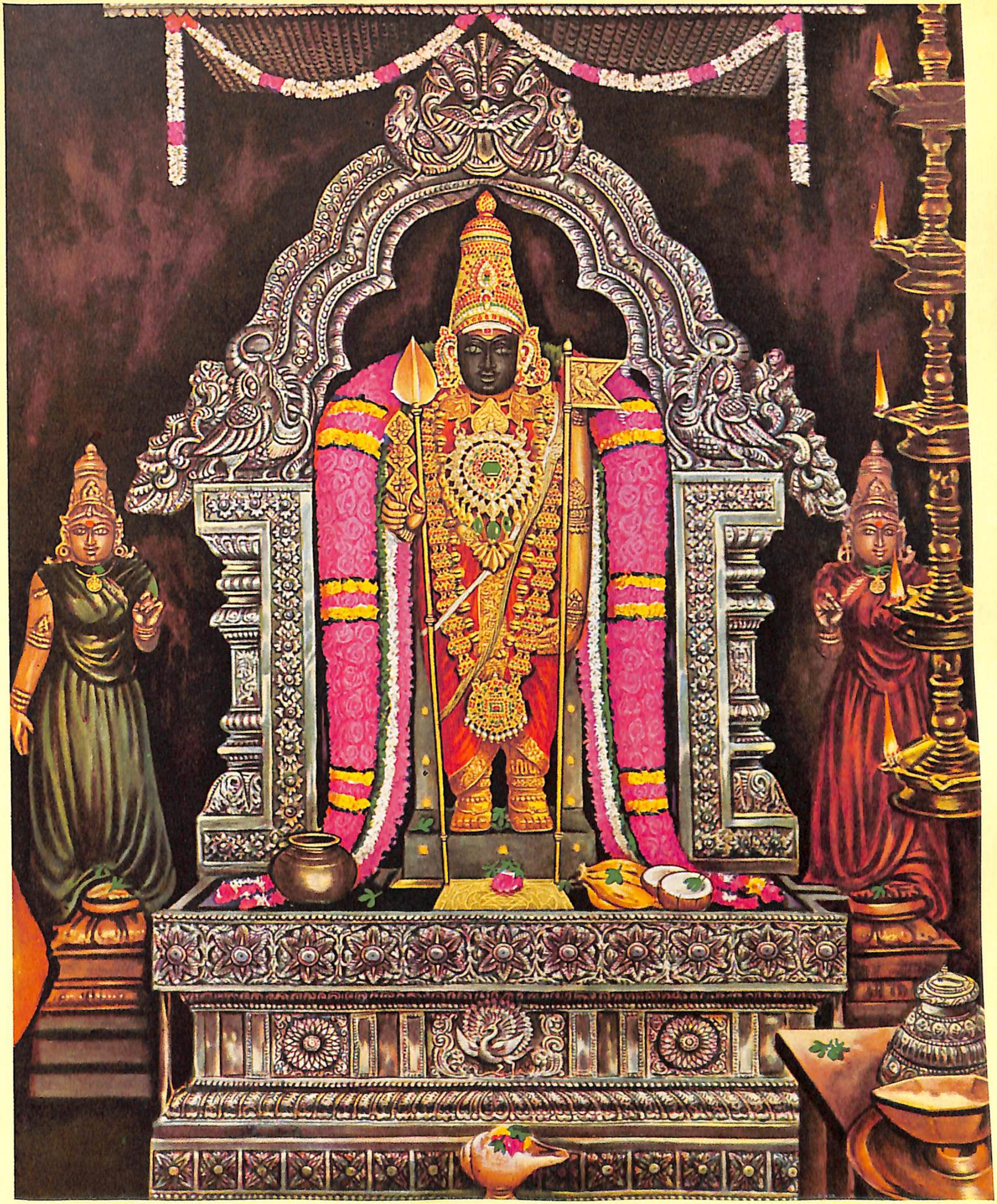
TIRUTTANI - *Tamil Nadu*

This temple is situated on a hillock on the Madras – Bombay Railway line, 84 km from Madras.

Lord Subramanya gives *darsan* along with Valli and Devasena after his anger caused by his battle with *Soorapadman* and friction with the hunters on account of Valli were quenched. Hence the name Tiruttani.

One of the trinity of Carnatic Music Muthuswamy Dikshitar is reported to have got inspiration for his creative music at Tiruttani.

Adi-Kritigai Theppa (float) *utsavam* and *tiruppadi vizha* on the eve of the new year, attract a large number of devotees.



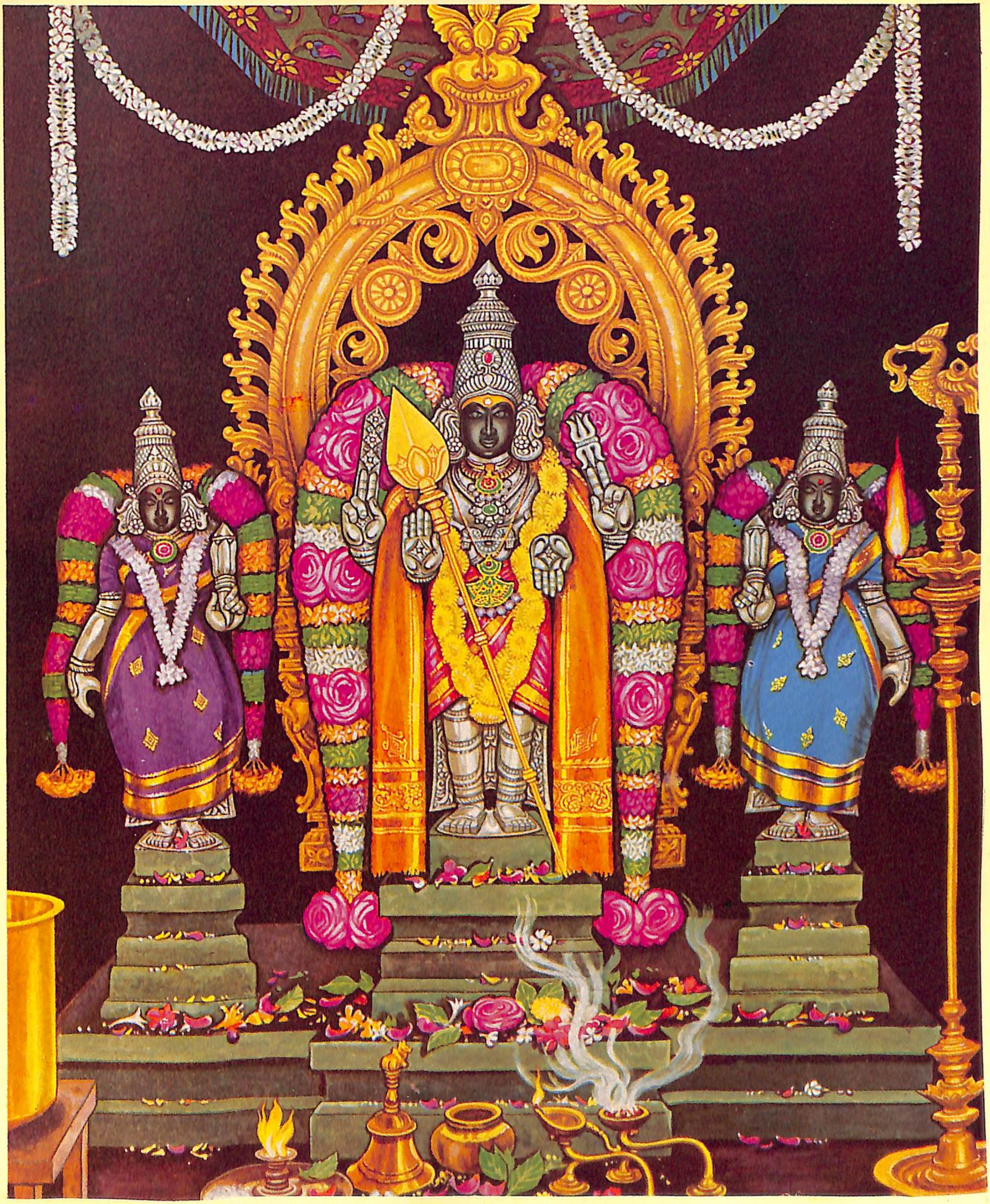
Sri SUBRAMANYA —*Tiruttani*

PAZHAMUDIR SOLAI - *Tamil Nadu*

Located twelve miles off Madurai (Tamil Nadu, amidst inspiring natural surroundings, in an area, popularly called *Kallalagarkoil* (Vaishnavite Shrine), is the sixth Padai Veedu, a temple for Subramanya is known as *Pazhamudir Solai*.

Tamil Poetess Avvayyar, revered for her moral and ethical teachings, had *darsan* of Subramanya here in her ecstatic moments.

In the *Sanctum Sanctorum,* Lord Subramanya appears with his consorts - Valli and Devasena.



Sri SUBRAMANYA — *Pazhamudir Solai*

SAIVAM

Siva means *mangalam* - welfare. And the cult devoted to the worship of Siva is *Saivisam*. He is supposed to be the destroyer of the world and hence the most feared,but he is in reality the most benevolent and pleasing to those who abide by the laws of Nature, prescribed the code. Among all the Gods, he is the one who is easily pleased.

His role appears to be ever meditating for the good of the living beings.. He has never taken an incarnation - except as spiritual preachers like Adi Sankara.

He is married to Uma, the tamasic form of Sakti - from whom he get his powers.

KEDARNATH *(Himalayas)*

The temple of Kedarnath is located at an altitude of 11,735 feet in the Rudra Himalayan ranges, also called Sumeru Parvat.

Kedara is mentioned in the *Siva Puranam* as well as Mahabharata. Legend has it that Vishnu as *Nara* and *Narayana was* doing penance at Badrinath. The two sages used to mould a Sivalinga from the soil and worship it. Siva pleased with their tapas gave them a boon and as a sequel to their request Siva has taken the abode of Kedar as a *Jyotirlinga*.

Like Badrinath, Kedarnath is also closed during the written and the God moves down to *Ukhimath* along with his devotees.

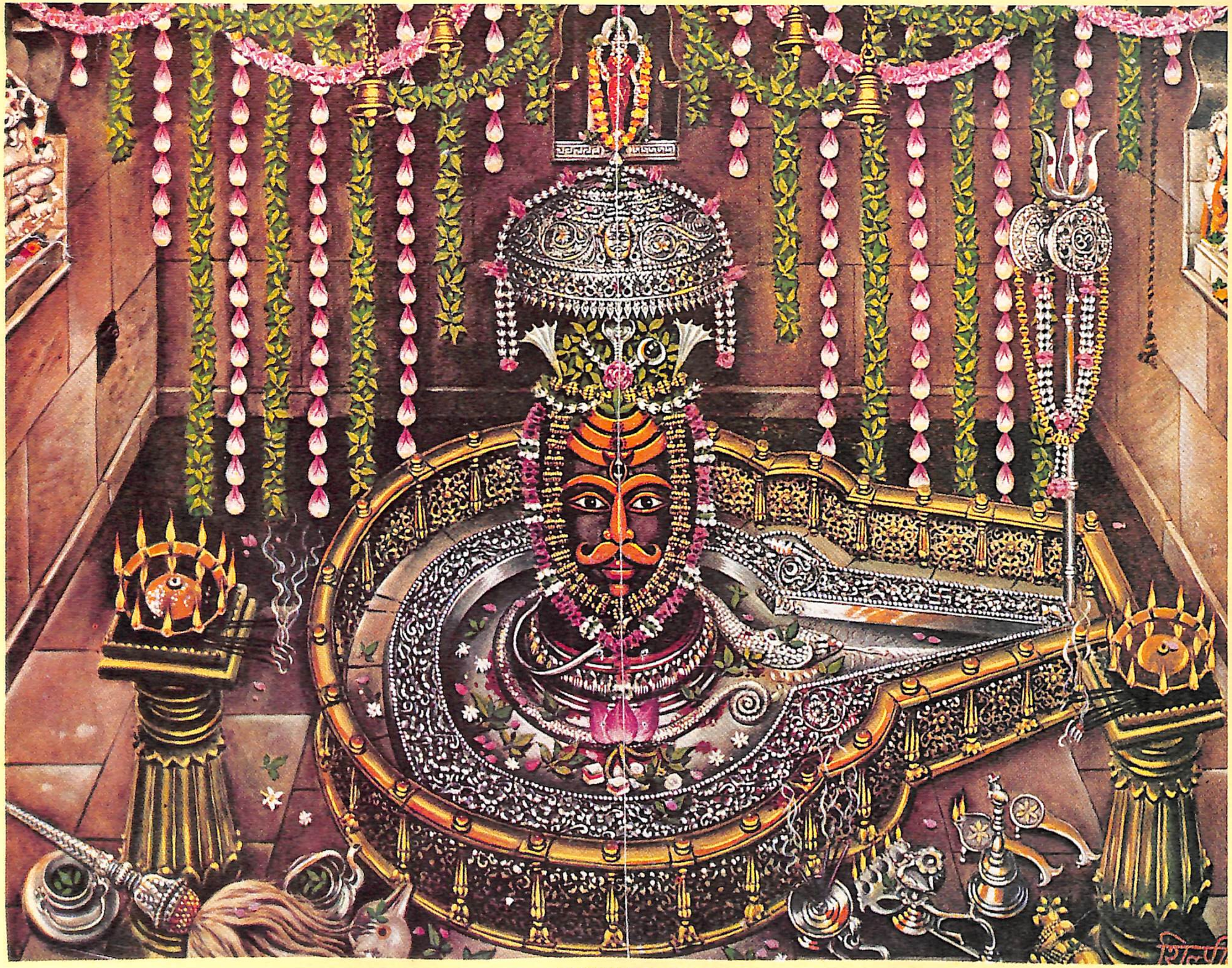


Sri KEDARNATH

MAHAKALESWARA (*Ujjain – Madhya Pradesh*)

One of the seven-sacred *Mokshapuris* Ujjain is the abode of *Mahakaleswara*, the Siva who has incarnated at Ujjain to protect his devotees from untimely death. Mentioned in Mahabharata as Avanti - (Ujjain), the city was the capital of the great Vikramaditya of the Mauryas and lately by the Holkars. Kalidasa, the court poet of Vikramaditya lived here and rendered his immortal classics. Even the Chinese traveller Hean-Tsang has recorded the glory of Ujjain.

Besides being one of the *Jyotirlinga* Kshetra's, Ujjain is also one of the four sacred places where Kumbha Mela is held, when the planet Guru enters the Simha Rasi and the Sun occupies the Mesha Rasi and the Moon is transitting Tula Rasi.



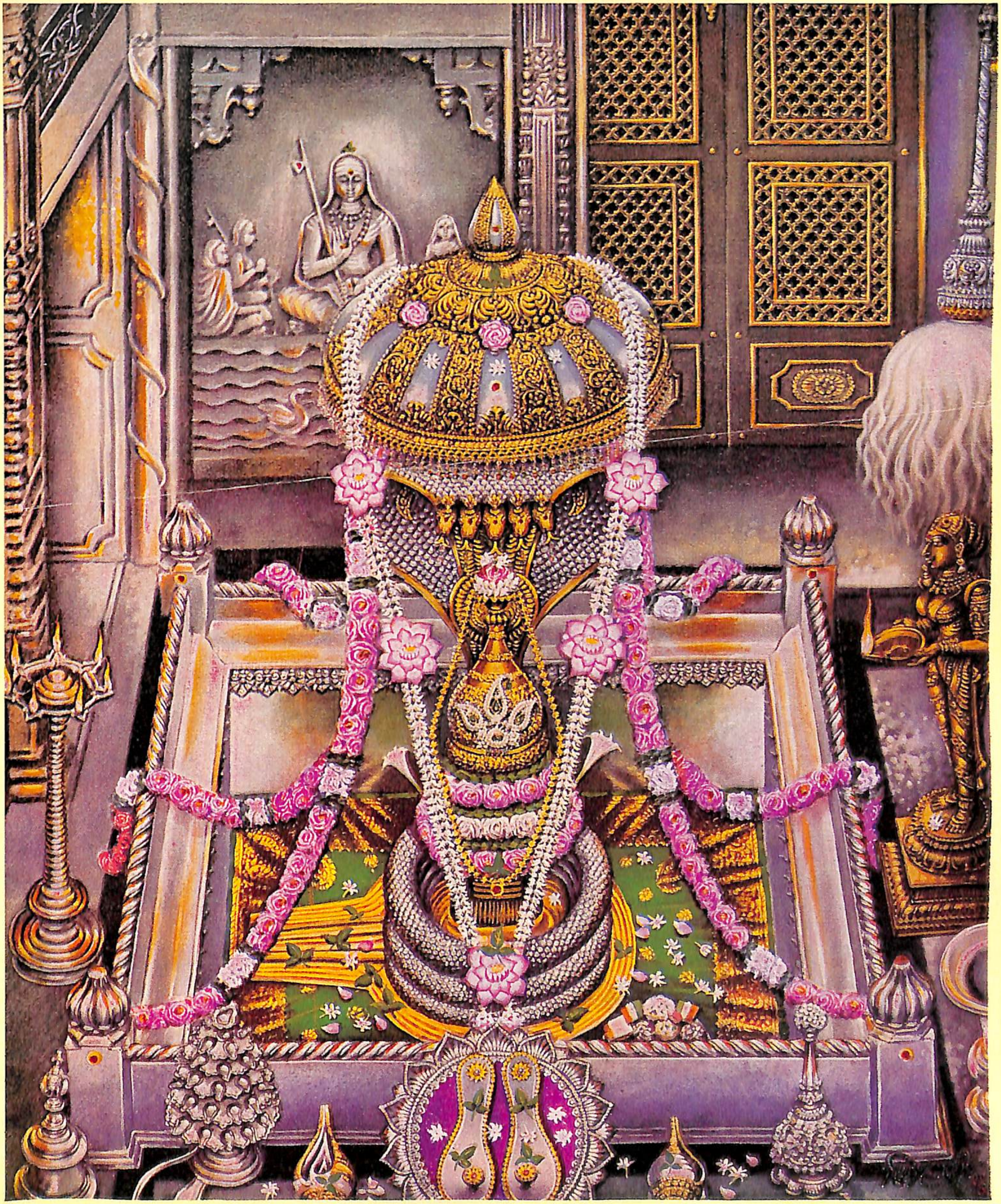
Sri MAHAKALESHWAR — *Ujjain*

Sri. VISWANATHA *(Varanasi – Uttar Pradesh)*

Kasi or Varanasi is the spiritual, religious and cultural centre of India. It is believed philosophy and religion grew in that holy place, banked by the Ganga which flows South-North. Sage Vyasa, who synthesised the *Vedas* into four divisions, is said to have lived here and wrote his commentary on *Brahmasutra*. Adi Sankara met the sage here and presented his commentaries on *Brahmasutra*, *Upanishads* and Bhagavat Gita - and got his blessings. Adi Sankara had the darshan of Lord Visweswara at Kasi, who came in the form of a *Panchama*— low caste, and taught the former the true import and meaning of 'I am the Brahman' — one of the *Mahavakyas*, which inspired the rendering, of *Manisha Panchakam* by Adi Sankara.

Kasi is one of the seven *Mokshapuris*—centres of spiritual emancipation and Lord Viswanatha, one of the twelve Jyothir Lingams. Kasi Viswanatha Lingam is very small in size and devout pilgrims are allowed to worship personally. According to tradition, Vishwanatha is believed to utter the *Taraka Mantra — Rama* - in the ears of the dying person at Kasi and hence the longing for everyone to spend one's last moments at Kasi. While at Kasi, Viswanatha in the form "Siva" imparted "Rama" mantra to devotees, and at Rameswaram, Rama worshipped Siva.

The ancient name of Sri Viswanatha is Ari Markteswara.



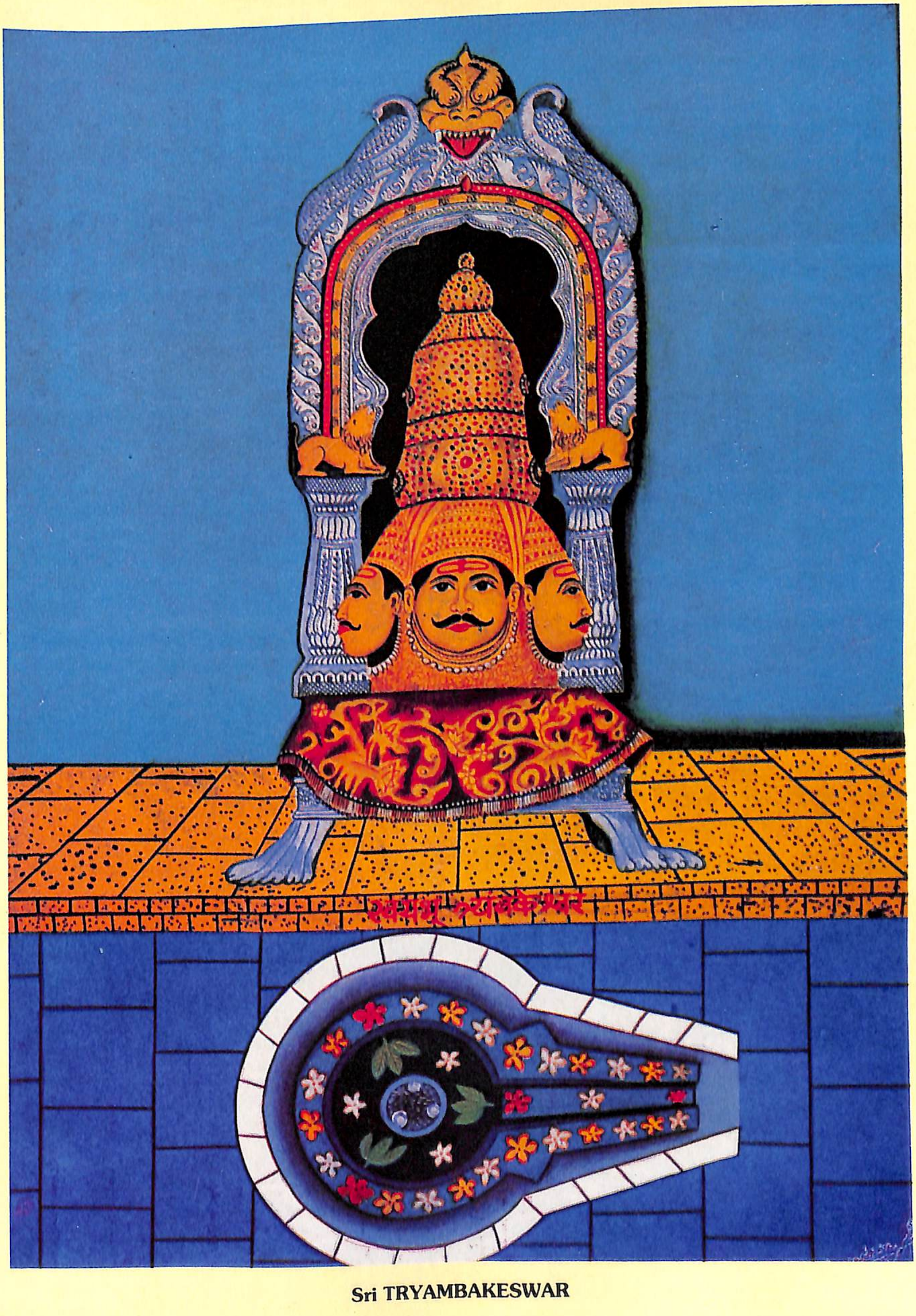
Sri VISWANATHA — *Kasi*

TRYAMBAKESWARA *(Nashik – Maharashtra)*

On the slope of the mountain of Sahyadri and on the sacred bank of river Godavari resides Tryambakeswara whose mere vision destroys all sins.

Nasik, the main city barely 36 kms from Tryambaka, is an industrial area. The present temple of Tryambakeswara was built by Balaji Peshwa in place of the ancient temple which existed there. The town of Tryambak is known for its learned Brahmins who are by tradition, students of the *Vedas* and *Vedic* rituals.

The Jyotirlinga of Tryambakeswara has a small crack at the top and there is a constant flow of water from it. Devotees believe that Gautami Ganga performs constant *abhishekam* to the Lord in this manner. The linga is covered with a golden mask with five faces carved on it.



Sri TRYAMBAKESWAR

Sri KALAHASTEESWARA *(Sri Kalahasti — Andhra Pradesh)*

Sri Kalahasti is the *Vayu Kshetra* (Sivalinga Wind) among the five places dedicated to the five elements of nature, (*Pancha Bhootha Kshetras).* It is situated in Chittoor District, 65 Kms from Tirupati, in Andhra Pradesh.

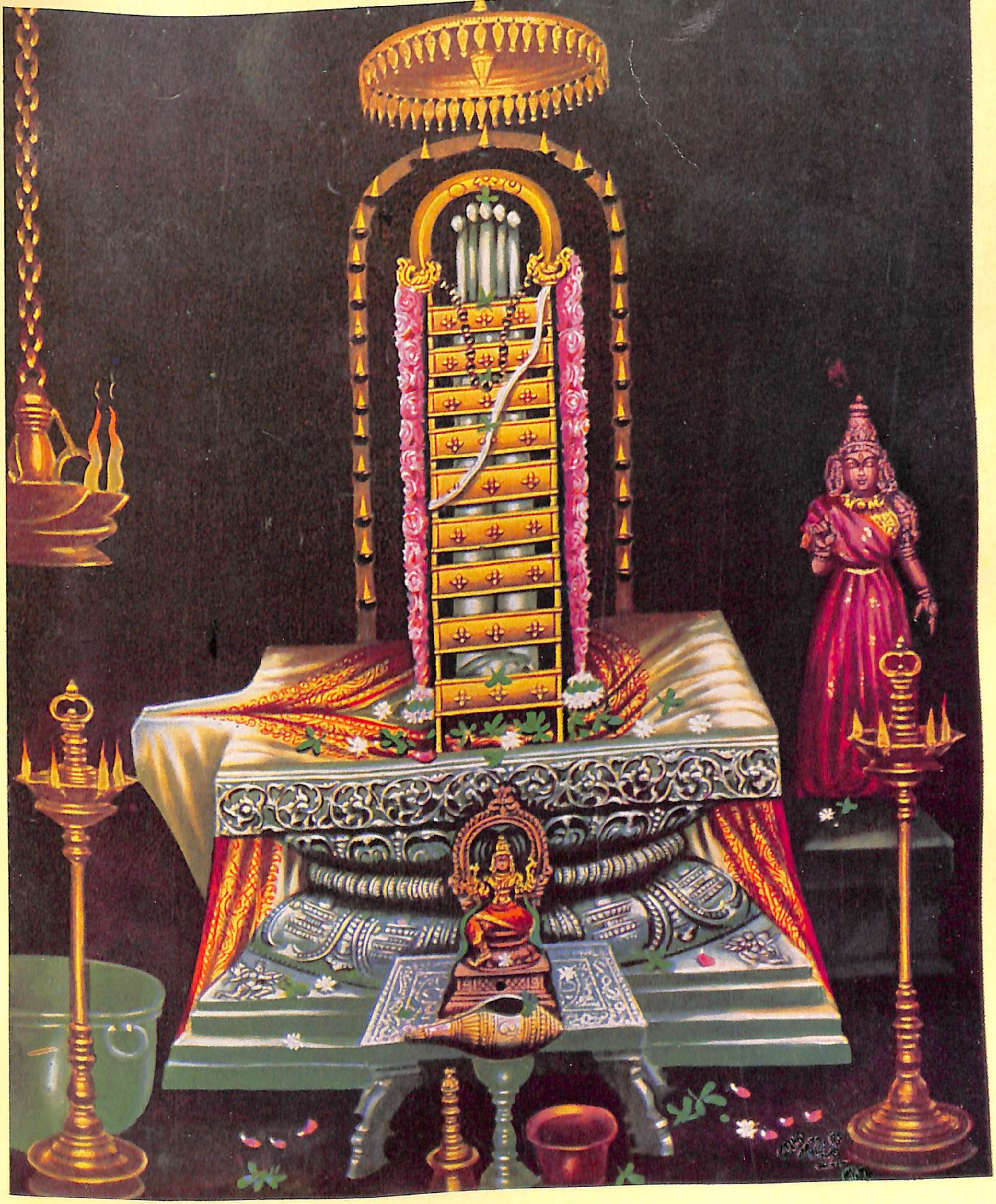
The light in the sanctum sanctorum is always *seen* gently swaying as if blown by a wind.

Sri Kalahasteewara was worshipped by spider (*Si)*, snake *(Kalash)* and elephant *(Hasti)*. Hence the name Sri Kalahasti. It is considered to be Southern Kailas. The hill of Kalahasthi was originally known as Kailasagiri, a chip of the legendary Meru Mountain. This Sivalinga was brought by Brahma from Kailas for his personal worship.

The consort of Sri Kalahasteewara is Gnana Prasannambika. Those who worship her and come under the benign influence of her grace are believed to attain spiritual knowledge and final emancipation from the cycle of birth and death.

Sri Kalahasteeswara gave darshan and blessed a hunter called Thinnanar. His devotion for the Lord was so intense that he gave his eyes to the Lord. He is none other than the Tamil Saint,Kannappa Nayanar.

Maha Sivarathri is celebrated with great reverence and fervour in this temple.



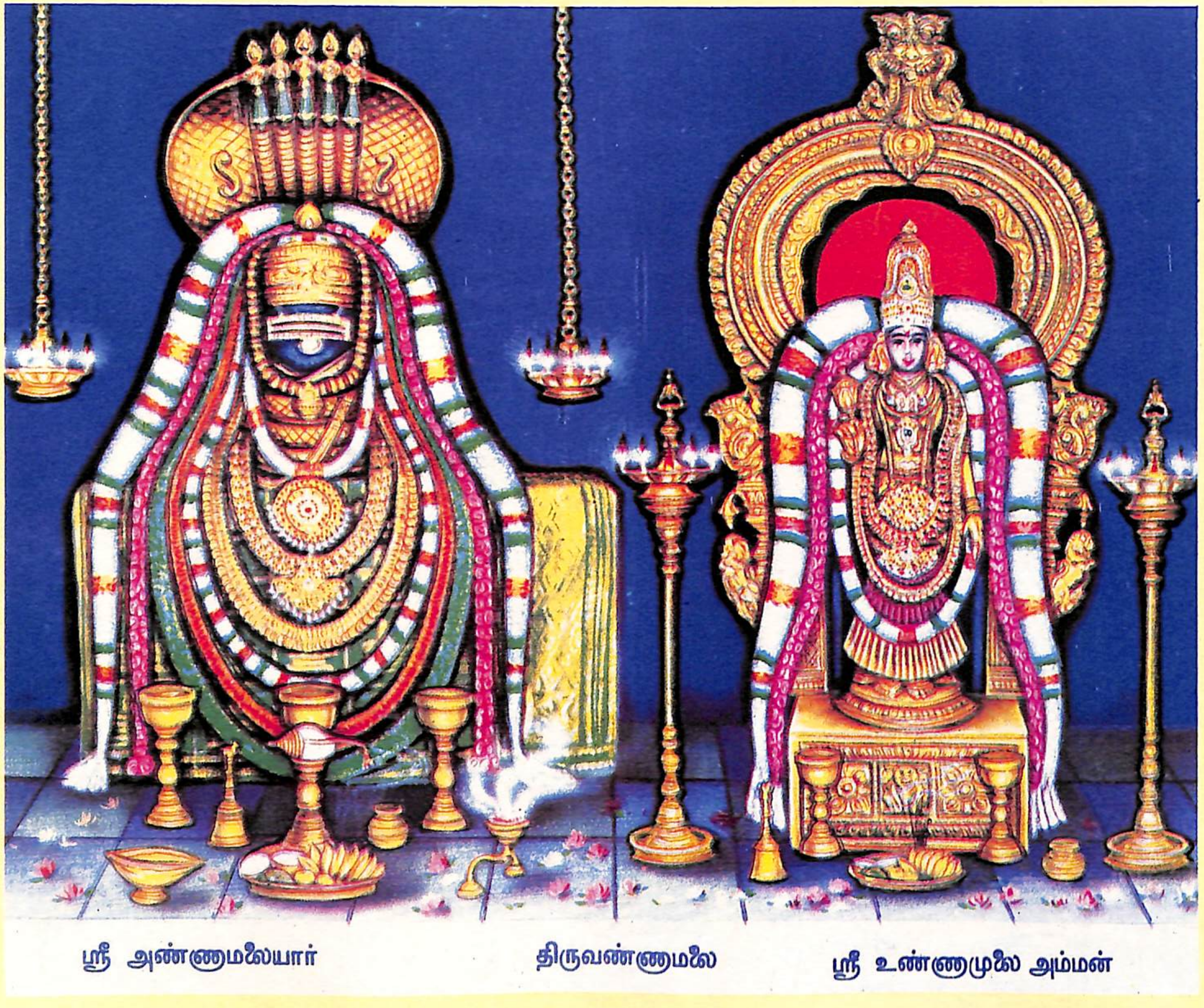
Sri KALAHASTEESWARA

TIRUVANNAMALAI — *(Tamil Nadu)*

The holy hill of Arunachala is about 100 miles from Madras and at the foot of the hill is the Siva temple — which enshrines one of the Panchabhutha Lingams namely Jyotir (Tejas) Lingam. The presiding deity is known as Sri Annamalayar and his consort Parvati is here named as Sri Unnamalai Amman.

On Kartik Poornima day, a huge lamp is lit at the top of the hill — which can be seen for miles around and it is believed that everyone who sees the light attains salvation.

The hill side is an abode of spiritual glory and the renowned Ramana Maha Rishi lived here and many of his disciples took advantage of his wisdom. The Ramana Ashram is a peaceful haven.



Sri ANNAMALAYAR and Sri UNNAMALAI AMMAN

CHIDAMBARAM – *Tamil Nadu*

Chidambaram, situated 151 miles south of Madras is one of the oldest religious centres mentioned in inscriptions and history as far back as the 6th century AD. Probably the holy city existed a long time before that.

Popularly known as *Chitrambalam* or Atmosphere of wisdom, Chidambaram is mainly famous for the great temple of Siva as Nataraja. The temple, extensively occupying an area of 32 acres, surrounded on all sides by massive walls, intersected by lofty and magnificent gopurams, is an abode of sanctity that is revered throughout India.

The sanctuary contains one of the *Panchabutha Lingams* namely *Akasa Lingam* which has been described as the *Chidambara Rahasyam* or secret of Chidambaram. The Lord is supposed to be existing here behind a curtain and when the screen is drawn for the devotees to have a *darshan,* mystery surrounds the shrine and just an empty space appears to one and all. The *Akasa Lingam* does not appear to the naked eye. It requires an inner eye to see the Lord in an empty space. That is the secret.

There is perhaps no other temple in India where the religious differences of the two cults – *Saivism* and *Vaishnavism* have been overcome by absolute tolerance as at Chidambaram. Here the devotee can worship both Siva and Vishnu simultaneously, made possible by the erection of a shrine to Vishnu, as *Govindaraja* at right angle to the shrine of Lord Nataraja.

What a nobler idea could exist than this ? God is but one and religions are many. Sects are too many. If God is a tree, religions and sects are its innumerable branches and twigs. Tradition asserts that Lord Siva gave a performance of his *Tandava Nritya* in this place to please two of his devotees *Patanjali* and *Vyagrapada.*

Religiously the temple is holy, architecturally it is great. Artistically the temple is superb with thousands of sculptures, dancers, drummers and musicians. The 108 *Lasya* poses of the dance is chiselled in granite all over the temple *prakarams* and the *Nritta Sabha.*



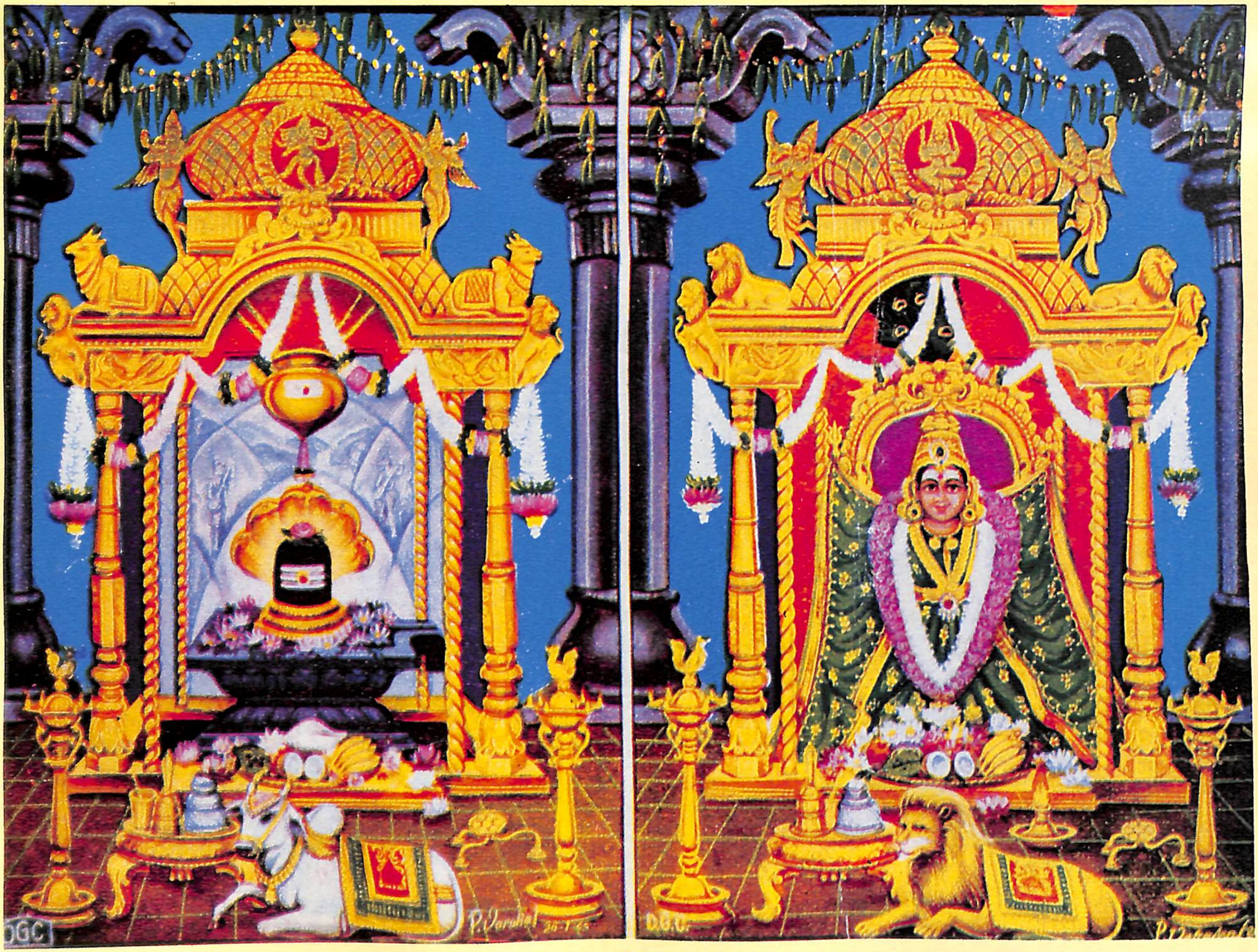
Sri NATARAJA — *Chidambaram*

SRISAILAM — *(Andhra Pradesh)*

Srisailam is situated in the hilly forest area of the Nandikotkur Taluk in Kurnool District. Srisailam is described as the Kailasa of the south is overlooking the river Krishna or one of its branches which is known here as Pathal Ganga. On this Srisaila Mount is the famous and ancient temple of Lord Siva known as Mallikarjuna. It is one of the twelve Jyotir Lingas. Srisailam is 112 Kms from Nandyal on the Guntoor-Vijayawada railway line. Some inscriptions establish that this area of Srisailam was a part of the kingdom of the great ruler, Krishna Deva Raya of Vijayanagar, and that it was a very flourishing place at one time.

The temple of Mallikarjuna is spread on a plateau and above 1500 metres above sea level. The courtyard occupies 500 x 600 feet. The temple dedicated to his consort Bhramarambika is on the western side. The devi is an incarnation of Ambika.

Bhramarambika's is one of the ancient and famous Saktipeethas and the Jyotirlinga of Mallikarjuna is described by the Lingayat Jangama priests as the *Linga Chakravarti*. The Siva and Sakti festivals take place separately one after the other. The Siva festival takes place on the Mahasivaratri day. After that the Sakti Festival starts.



Sri Mallikarjuna & Sri Bhrarambhika

Sri RAMANATHASWAMY *(Rameswaram —Tamil Nadu)*

Rameswaram is about 165 Kms from the city of Madurai. It is famous for its Ramanatha or Ramalingeswara temple, one of the twelve Jyotir Lingas (*Dwadasa Linga Kshetras)*. This temple is noted for its impressive sculptured and pillared corridors, of width varying from 17 feet to 21 feet which are about 30 feet high, and whose total length is nearly 4,000 ft.

The tower measuring about 100 feet in height is in a quadrangle of 1,000 feet length and 650 feet breadth.

Lord Sri Ramachandra is said to have installed Sri Ramanatha Swami after his victory over Ravana, for his personal worship and to atone for the sin of having killed Ravana, a repository of Vedas by birth. *(Brahmahathya Dhosham).*

The holy pilgrimage for a Hindu starts with collecting sand from Dhanushkoti, seashore 20 kms. from Rameswaram. It is complete only after immersing the sands in the Ganges at Prayag, the confluence of Ganga & Jamuna & the invisible Saraswathi, and the bathing of Sri Ramalingam at Rameswaram with holy Gange's water brought from there. This pilgrimage can also be started from Varanasi - Rameswaram and Varanasi.

The daughter of Himavan the Lord of the Himalayas, known as Parvathavardini, bestowed the will-power and strength to Sri Rama, to defeat Ravana, recover Sita from his clutches, and proceed to Ayodhya for his Coronation.

Sri Parvathavardini Ambal's shrine is on the southern side of Sri Ramanatha Lingam at Rameswaram. She is on the right side of the Lord.

The Mandap in front of Ambal's shrine is known as *Navasakti* or *Sukra-Vara Mandap* or Friday Mandap. On Fridays the idol of Sri Parvathavardini is taken in a golden *Palki* around the third Prakara with gaiety and music. It is a sight for the Gods to see.

During the day of Mahasivaratri, a very large gathering of Hindus from all parts of India, congregate at Rameswaram.

Sethupathi, rulers of Ramanathapuram, served as the protector of the pilgrims to Rameswaram and were called *Sethupati Kavalars.* They were greatly devoted to Rameswaram and have built a number of sculptures in the temple. Some of the portraits found in the temple are those of Sethupatis of Ramanad.



Sri RAMANATHASWAMY

SAKTAM

Saktam is the cult of Mother worship. Every women is a living goddess and only in India we pray and offer Puja to a living symbol of Sakti, either in the form of a *Kanya* or *Suvasini.*

Prior to the advent of Adi Sankara, the worship of Kali was practiced in its wildest form of sacrifices - humans and animals. It is believed that the Kali was ferocious. Adi Sankara evolved the theory of a Loveable Goddess and installed her in the Sri Chakra form - which is the current mode of worship.

That She is the Universal Mother is an undisputed fact. According to the Devi Bhagwatam, she is the absolute *Para Sakti.* She created the trinity of Gods - Brahma, Vishnu and Siva. She also created Saraswati, Laxmi and Parvati - her *amsa* representing the 3 gunas - *rajas - sattvic and tamas* and gave them away in marriage to the 3 Lords - to help them in their function of Creation, Preservation and Destruction.

In the *Soundarya Lahari,* it is said that Siva is in a position to perform his duties only when he is in union with Uma - or Parvathi and without her, he is just a dead body.. The power is complementary and true in respect of all the 3Gods. This applies to every living being. Do we not say that a woman is behind the man, for his success ?

We have separate shrines in every temple for the consort - in the same precincts. In every Siva temple we find the consort in any of her multi-faceted glory.

If we have Sri Ramanatha at Rameswaram, so is his consort Parvathavardhini, So is the case of Vaishnavism.

Mother worship has a great significance in the present age of turmoil in the world. There is a solace for mankind in the Devi worship.

Sri KAMAKSHI *(Kanchipuram —Tamil Nadu)*

This temple is situated in the centre of Kanchipuram Town, in Chingleput District Tamil Nadu. The Devi is seated in majestic Padmasana posture, showering grace, peace and plenty on those who come for her darshan. Besides holding *Pasa* and *Ankusa* on her upper arms, Sri Kamakshi holds sugar-cane bow and floral arrows in her lower arms.

Sri Kamakshi Devi is Raja Rajeswari, and an embodiment of universal power-Parasakti. Hence there is no separate Ambal or Sakti shrine in Siva temples within the limits of Kanchipuram.

Sri Adi Sankara had installed and consecrated a Srichakra in front of the Deity and the daily worship is done for this chakra — known as the Kamakoti Peeta.

Kamakshi is the presiding deity of the city of Kanchi. The Goddess is said to reside as Bala Tripurasundari in a Bila (niche) situated under the shrine. The front mandapa is called the Gayatri Mandapa. In the Ardha Mandapa preceding the Garbhagriha, the Goddess is enshrined in a pitha, as Sri Vidya Parameswari.



Sri KAMAKSHI

Sri AKILANDESWARI *(Tiruvanaikoil - Tamil Nadu)*

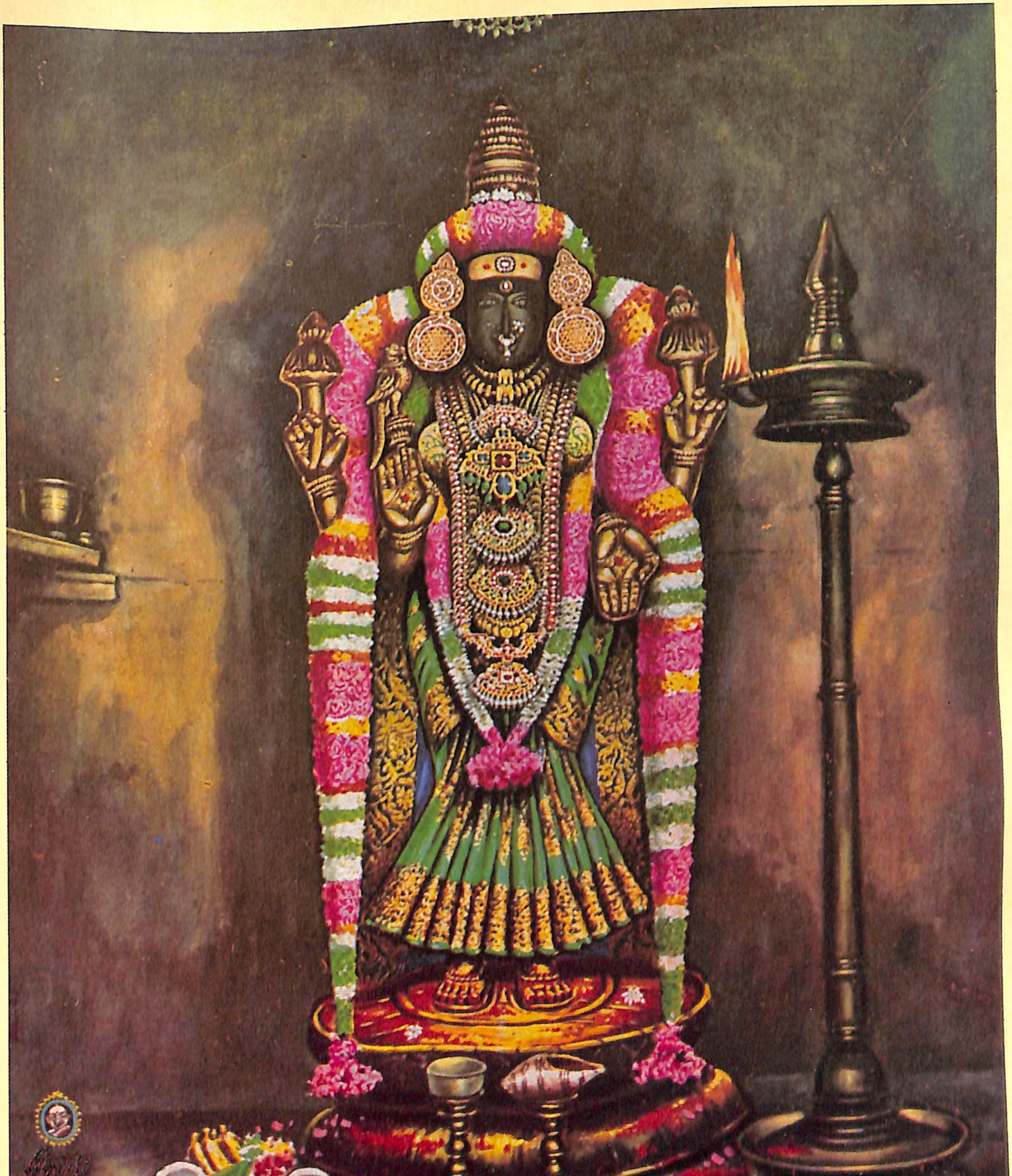
Jambukeswaram, popularly known as Thiruvanaikka is situated near Srirangam in Trichy District, Tamil Nadu. This is *Appu* or water linga among the five lingas dedicated to five elements. —Pancha Bootha Kshetras

There is perennial oozing of water from underneath the Sivalinga in the *Sanctum sanctorum*, which is emptied at regular intervals.

Lord Siva is said to have sat under a Jambu tree and done penance to have the *darshan* of Lord Vishnu in order to get rid of the sin of Brahmahatya (killing of a repository of Vedas).

Akilandeswari, the Mother of the Universe, is said to have worshipped the Lord in this temple. Symbolically even today, at noon the priest, dressed in a saree, performs pooja to Sri Jambukeswara.

It is said Sri Adi Sankara Bhagavadpada consecrated the *Thatanga* (earrings) Chakra, now adorning the ears of the Devi. Sri Adi Sankara installed a Ganapathy Vigraha in front of Sri Akilandeswari and this contained her *Ugrakalai* — malignant aspects.

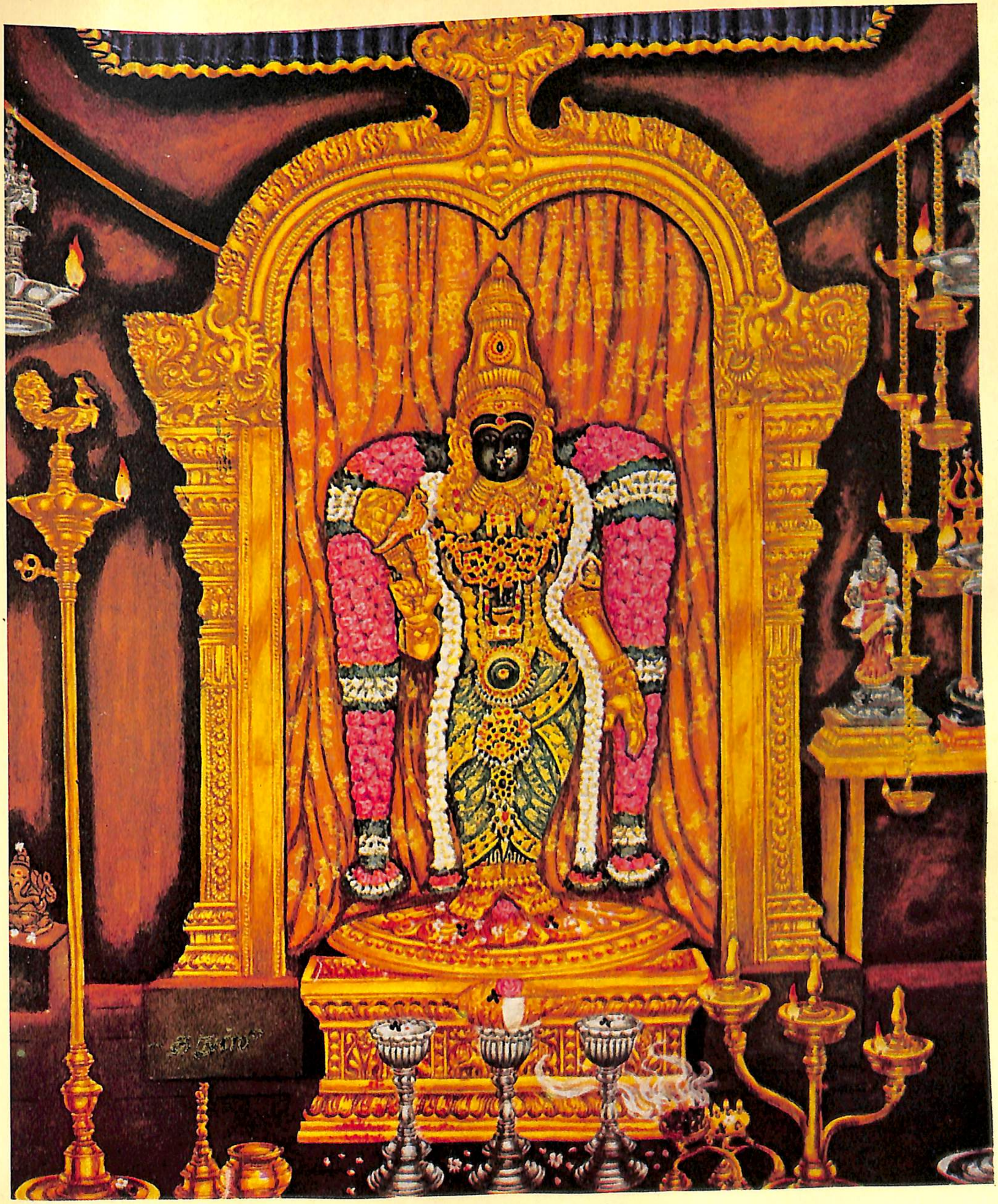


Sri AKILANDESWARI — *Jumbukeswaram*

Sri MEENAKSHI *(Madurai—Tamil Nadu)*

Madurai is about 492 Kms. from Madras. This town is famous for Goddess Meenakshi temple and was capital of Pandya Kingdom. Sri Meenakshi Devi is the incarnation of Parashakti. The *sthala purana* has it that the King Malaya Dhwaja, a great devotee of Lord SIVA was childless and hence conducted *puthra kameshti yagna*. Goddess Parvathi was born and named as Meenakshi (Her eyes being in the shape of fish). Meenakshi was a great devotee of Lord sundareswara (siva) and the Lord comes in disguise followed by many thrilling episodes known as *(sixty four tiruvilayadals)*, before marrying the goddess Meenakshi.

Many poets adorned the court of Pandya Kings and Madurai was the seat of tamil literature. It was also popularly known as the birth place of tamil sangam.



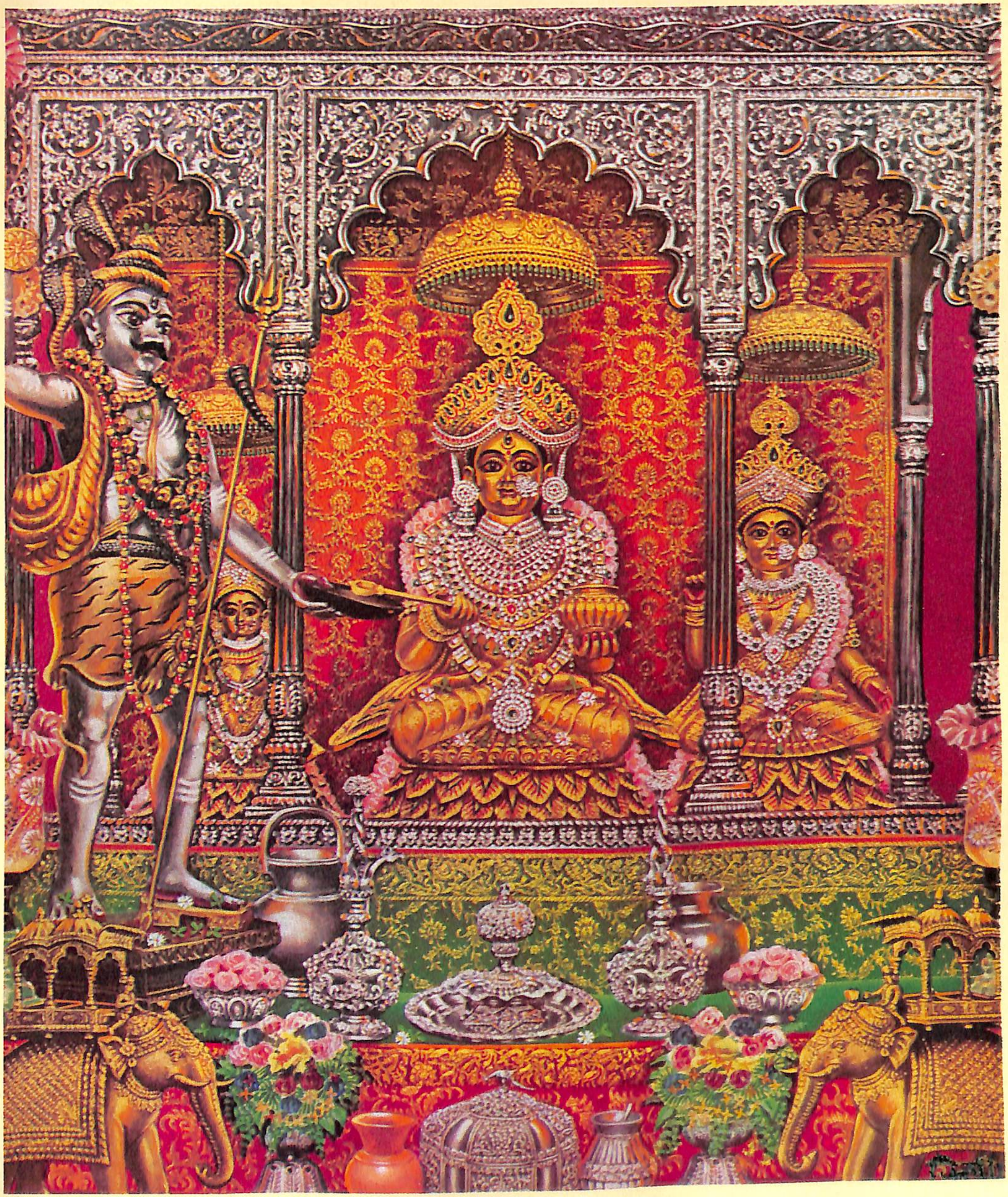
Sri MEENAKSHI — *Madurai*

Sri ANNAPOORNESWARI *(Varanasi— Uttar Pradesh)*

Annapoorneswari, the presiding goddess of Kasi. The Divine mother of the universe not only gives food and riches to her children, but also takes care of their spiritual emancipation by bestowing the nectar of *Atma Gnana*— the knowledge of the self. Adi Sankara who had immortalised the power and glory of Annapoorneswari, in his immortal hymns *Annapoornastakam* — eight verses rendered there, implores on our behalf the grant of *Gnana Vairagyam* — the steadfastness born out of realisation.

The beautiful golden idol of Annapoorneswari in the temple, which is hundred yards away from the Visweswara Temple, is thrown open for darshan to the devotees during Deepavali festival on *Dhanathriodasi* Day when Pooja is performed for the golden idol, and throughout next day on Chotti Deepavali Day — it is kept open for public darshan.

According to the *Sthalapuranam* — the universal mother, who started on a journey down south from Badrikasramam decided to stay at Varanasi, because of the drought for twelve years.



Sri ANNAPOORNESWARI

Sri KALIMATHA *(Calcutta - West Bengal)*

This temple known as Kalighat Temple situated in Calcutta is one of the 52 *Sakti Peetas* of India. It is situated in Alipore about 5 miles from Howrah. There is always a big crowd of devotees from all over the country to worship the Kali Mata. The poojas and other festivals of light, crackers and colourful processions connected with Navarathri celebrations are hallmarks and highlights of the festivals conducted in honour of the Goddess Kali.



Sri KALI MATHA

VAISHNAVAM

The cult devoted to the worship of Vishnu, and his ten incarnations specially Sri Rama and Sri Krishna is *Vaishnavam*.

The great saints Ramanuja and Chaitanya and many Vaishnavite seers gave a convincing boost to the spread of Vaishnavam throughout Bharat. And the two incarnations Sri Rama and Sri Krishna have been instrumental for the wide spread practice of Vaishnavism.

Vishnu is married to Laxmi, who gives him the power of love and care.

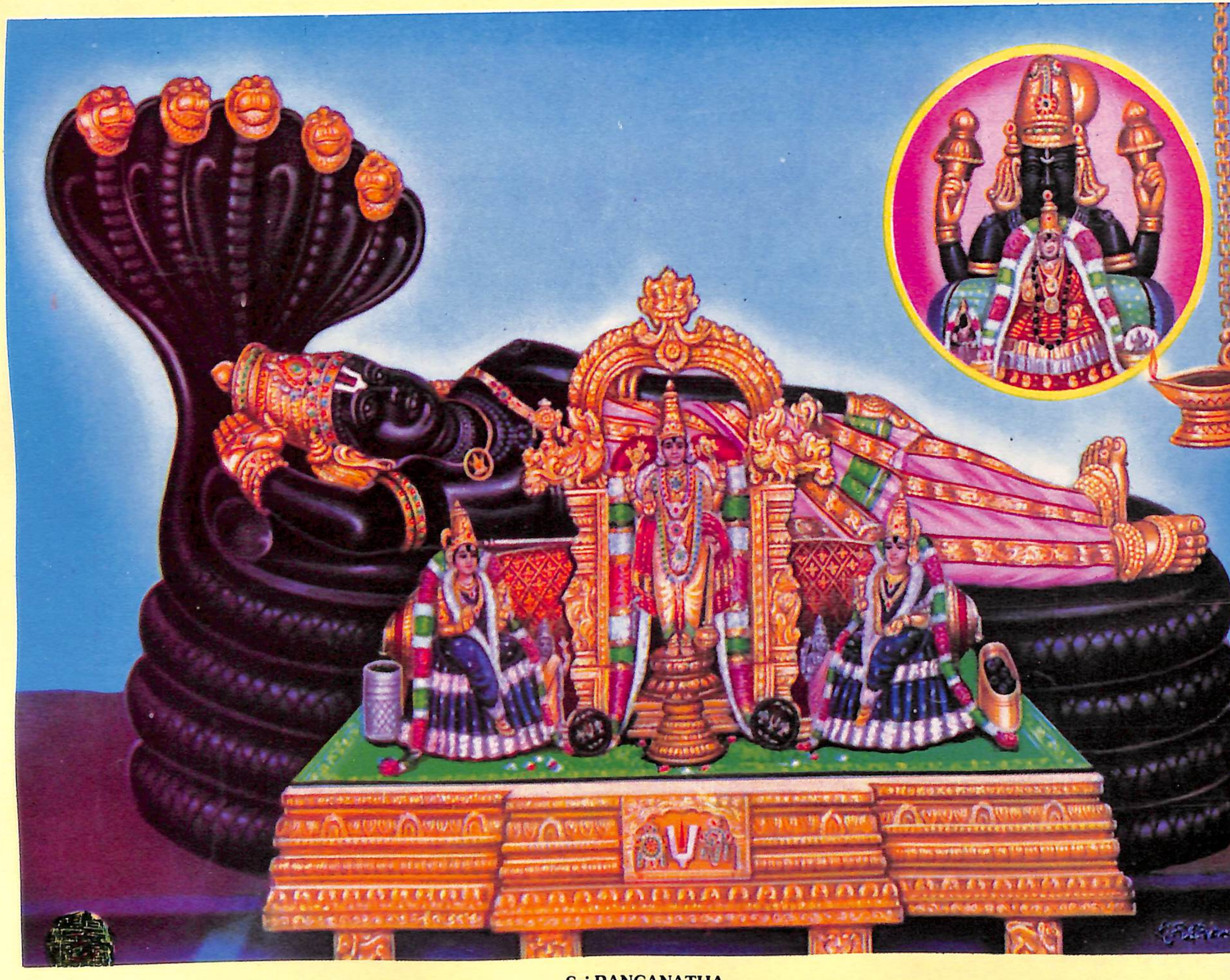
Sri RANGANATHA *(Srirangam - Tamil Nadu)*

The temple of Sri Ranganatha is situated at *Srirangam* on an island strip, between the sacred Kaveri river and its largest branch, the Kollidam. This temple is foremost among the 108 Divya-Desas sacred to Sri Vaishnavites and one of the greatest in the South, known as *Booloka Vaikuntam.* Historically this is four thousand years old. This temple has seven *prakaras* some of the outer ones being regular streets with residential houses. In this temple, Sri Mahavishnu known as Ranganatha is in a reclining pose, on the serpent couch, *Adisesha,* awe-inspiring in size.

The *Sthalapurana* has it that the Lord was worshipped by Vibishana, brother of Ravana.

According to Valmiki's Ramayana, the idol of Ranganatha at Srirangam was the one worshipped by the predecessors of Sri Rama of the Ikshwaku dynasty of Ayodhya. Srirangam is a centre of pilgrimage all round the year. All the 12 *Alwars* (realised souls) in their ecstatic darshan of the Lord have rendered *Pasurams* in praise of the Lord.

The 'Arayar Seva', the exposition of *Divya Prabandam* (Tamil Vedas), through *Nritya* is a remarkable item forming part of the festival of Lord Ranganatha. Vaishnava Acharya Sri Ramanuja adorned the pontifical seat at Srirangam and spent nearly twenty years and wrote his monumental works.



Sri RANGANATHA

HIMALAYAN ABODES OF GOD — The Holy Badrinath

In the scriptures, it is said that our departed ancestors have always believed and have ever been praying with a profound faith that "an illustrious descendent of theirs will come to Badri Vishal and offer *Pindas* to them at the Brahma Kapala and then they will be liberated and attain *Moksha*.

Beliefs and rituals apart, at least for the serene beauty of the Himalayas and the alpine atmosphere, a trip to Badrinath is a rewarding experience and a pilgrimage will definitely lift everyone spiritually, mentally and physically.

The holy shrine on the banks of the Alakananda and the valley town flanked by the two mountains Nara and Narayana has the added attraction of the Nilakanta peak, ever bound in snow and called the queen of the Himalayas, peeping at the temple giving a glimpse of the Himalayan glory and beauty.

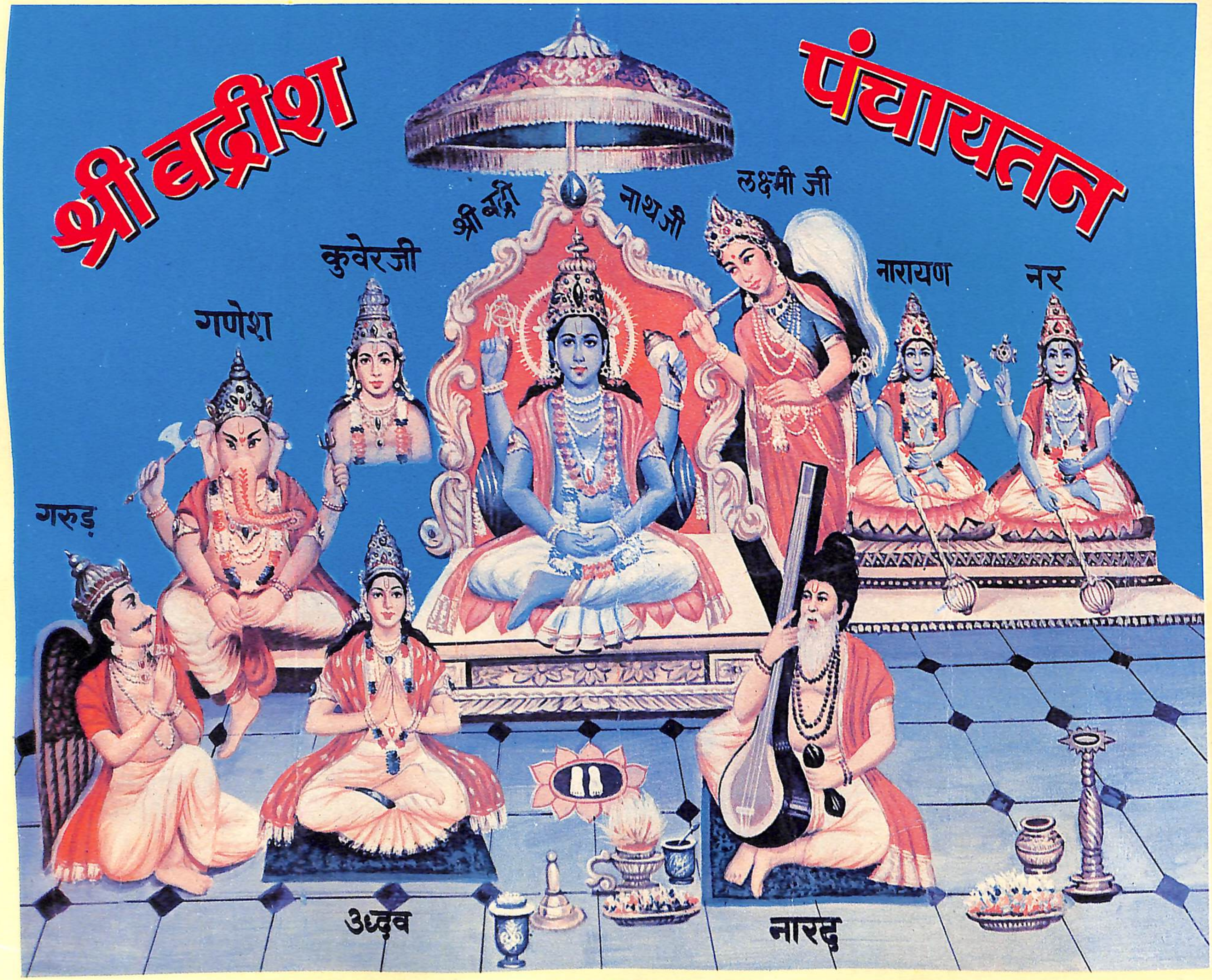
With 10,300 feet for an altitude, the Badri Vishal comes alive in the month of May when pilgrims throng the town. In November, the entire population migrates to Joshimath, along with the God, when the temple is closed for winter.

The temple was originally erected and Sri Badrinarayan installed by Adi Sankara but avalanches have washed away the temple many a time and the temple as it stands today is 45 feet in height with shining *kalasam* on the top.

In the *Sanctum Sanctorum* Lord Narayana is seated in the Padmasana pose. The *shaligram* is black but the skillful Rawal priest decorates the idol to present a *Viswaroopa*. On his left are Nara, Narayana and on the right are Ganesh, Kubera and Garuda. In front are the images of Narada and Uddhava.

Mention should be made that the Badri temple is devoted to Vishnu and it is one eye of the Himalayan ranges, Kedarnath devoted to Siva being the second eye.

The sanctity of the temples, the religious rites, all in the traditional vedic style are strictly performed since ages by the Namboodiris of Kerala now called Rawals.



Sri BADRINATH

Sri JAGANNATH *(Puri — Orissa)*

The temple of Lord Jagannath is located in the city of Puri in Orissa on the sea coast. The ancient nature of this temple is borne out by its mention in the Rig Vedas. Structurally it is unusual and beautiful, being 214 feet tall with a metallic wheel of perimeter 36 feet fixed on its peak.

The unique feature of this temple is that the important deities worshipped here are Lord Jagannath, his brother Lord Balarama and his sister Devi Subhadra. The daily pooja in the temple start with the waking up of the deities, placing them in front of a huge mirror and sprinkling their images with scented water and offering of food items seven times a day covering a variety of 56 items.

Every year in the month of June, the deities are taken for a boat ride, bathed with 107 pots of sacred water and subsequently are offered carefully chosen food items. The *Rath* Yatra of Lord Jagannath is known world-wide. The Rath (Chariot) itself is 60 feet high and has 16 wheels. Millions of devotees throng to witness this festival.

The idols have a unique appearance with big eyes, a wide mouth and wooden sticks to support the hands and the feet. Legend has it that while one king named *Indradhyumnan* tried to usurp the idol of Lord Jagannath from the devotee *Viswavasu*, it disappeared and the king was instructed to use the log that he would find floating in the sea to make the idols. An old man offered to make these, with the condition that none should open the room for 21 days. But the impatient king had the room opened after 15 days on hearing no sound emanating from the room. The idols were found in the room in an unfinished condition.

These idols are placed on a pedestal of 20 feet height. The temple is both divine and beautiful.



Sr. JAGAANNATH along with Sr. BALARAM and Devi SUBADRA

DWARAKA

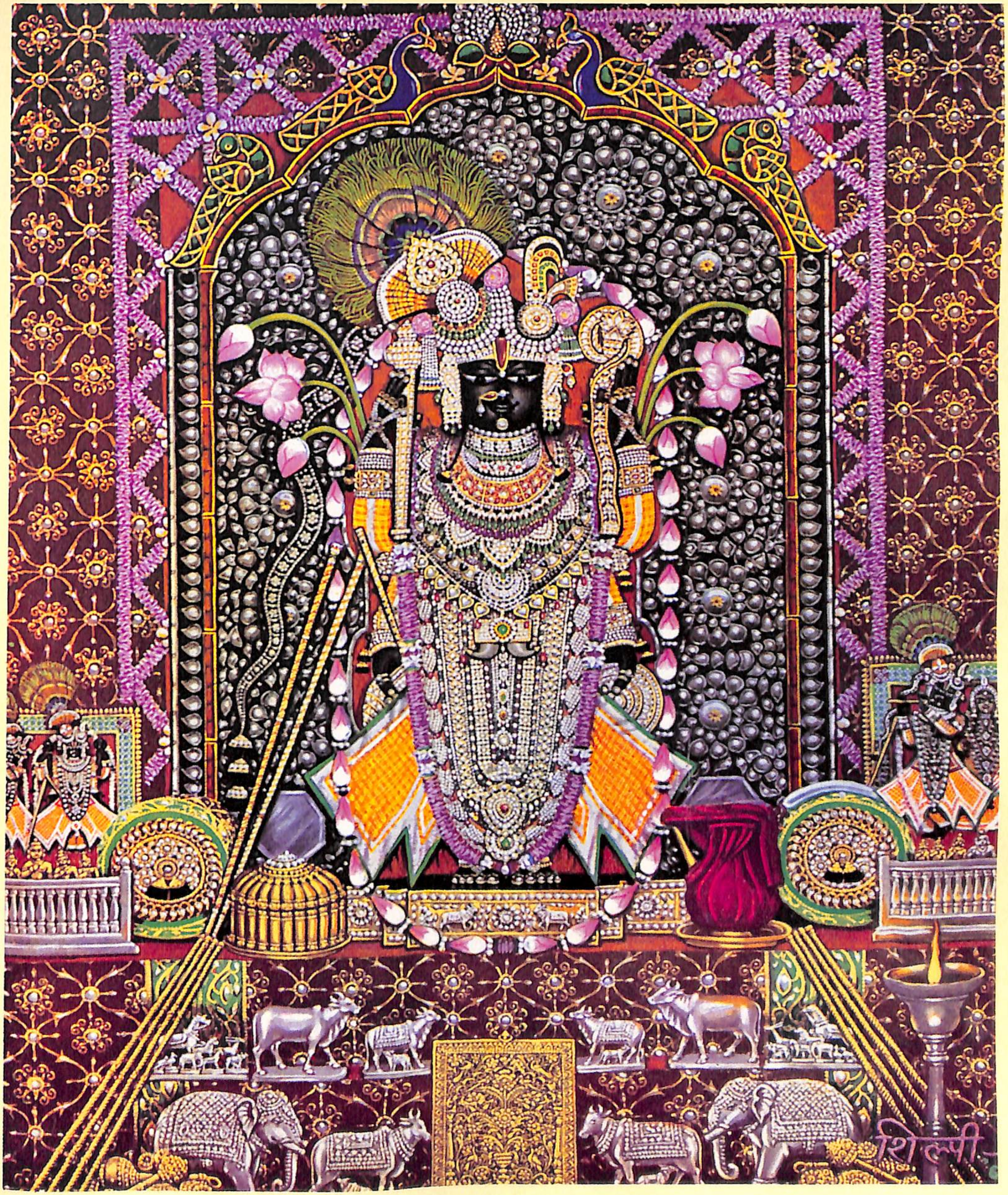
Dwaraka, the abode of Lord Krishna is mentioned in every scripture known to the Hindu – Mahabharata. Harivamsa, Vayu Puranam and Bhagvatam. Research scholars identify the present Dwaraka with the original capital of Krishna. Some dispute it, as some puranas indicate that the prosperous Dwaraka was inundated by the sea.

Dwaraka is in Saurashtra near Okha port and famous for the temple of Dwarakadish, popularly known as Ranchodrai. The temple on the banks of the river Gomati has a beautiful Sikar, seven storeyed and 140 feet high. The mandapa has five storeys with a dome supported by 64 pillars.. Extensive and delicate carvings adorn the precincts.

Five rituals called *Go-Karas* are prescribed for the devotee (a) A bath in the river Gomati (b) Intake of Go-maya (c)Go-dana, the gift of a cow (d) Gopi Chandana application of the white earth (e) Darshan - of the Gopinath - Krishna, all connected with the holy cows and the gopis.

Adi Sankara established the Dwarka Peet (Mutt) and installed Sri. Sureshwara (Mandana Misra prior to his conversion) as the Peetadhipadhi - And the tradition continues to this day.

Dwaraka has been visited and glorified by the great Seers like (Ramanuja Madhwacharya and innumerable religious saints like Jnaneshvar, Vallabacharya, Govindswami of Bengal, Chaitanya Prabhu and Meerabai.



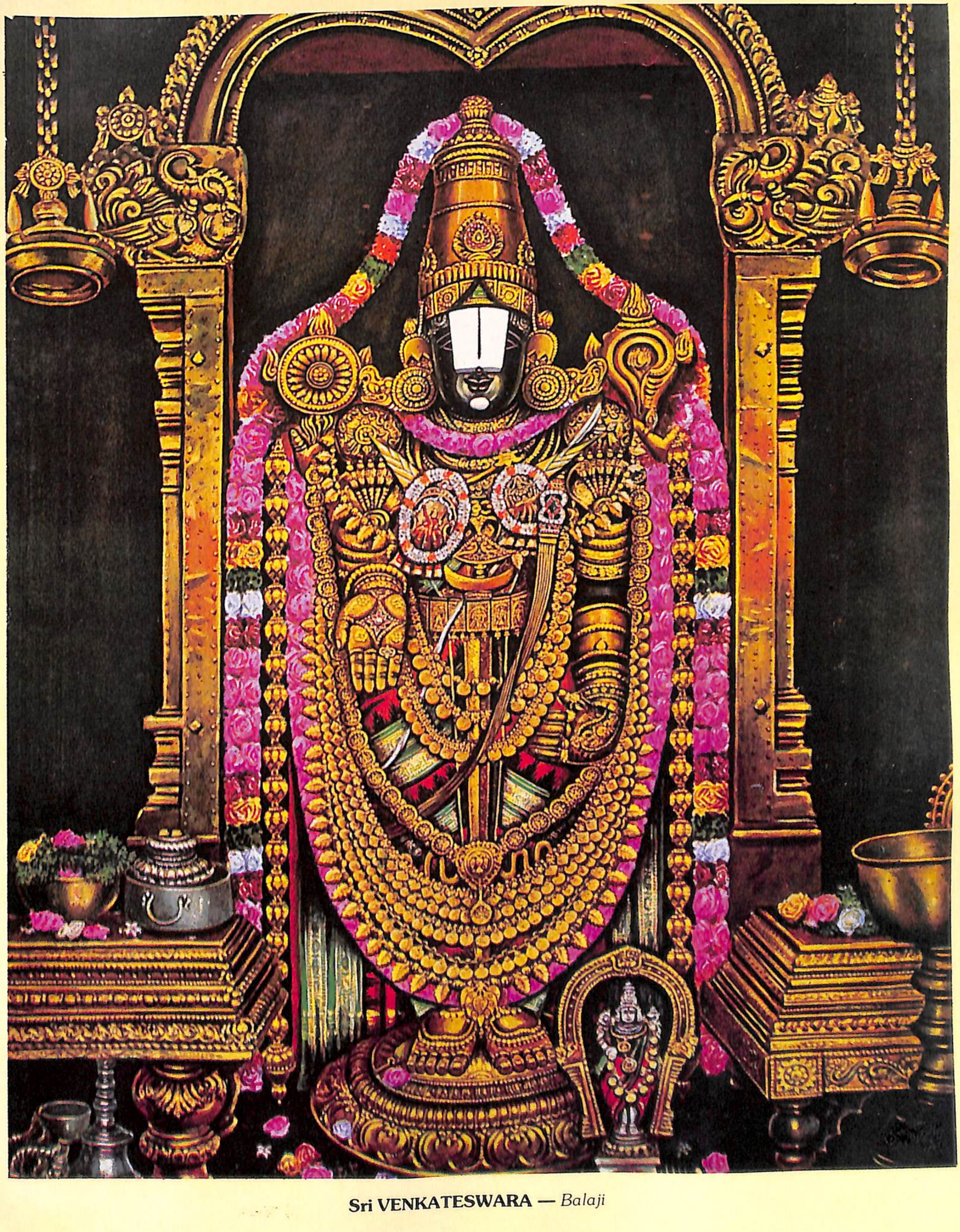
Sri KRISHNA — *Dwaraka*

Sri VENKATESWARA *(Tirupathi — Andhra Pradesh)*

Situated in Chittoor district, as a branch railway line conntected to Renigunta on the main Bombay-Madras line, also accessible by air and bus from all parts of South India, Tirupathi is one of the *Swayamuyaktha Kshetras* (place hallowed by the descent of cosmic power [God] on earth), where the devout worshipper is believed to experience the effects of prayer.

The temple is on the top of seven hills, and is one of the 108 places of worship sacred to the Vaishnavites. The richest temple in India, visited by the maximum number of devotees from all over India, the presiding deity is known as as *Venkateshwara*, *Venkatachalapathi* and *Srinivasa* in the south, and *Balaji* in the north. The poorest of the poor and the rich, pour their offerings in the Hundial there, as a mark of sacrifice and perform *Anga Pradakshina* a special form of praying with folded hands, all parts of the body in touch with the ground, the body itself rolling on the inner Prakaram of the temple housing the deity, a sign of total *Physical surrender.* Darshan is available to the devotees throughout the day except for a short break.

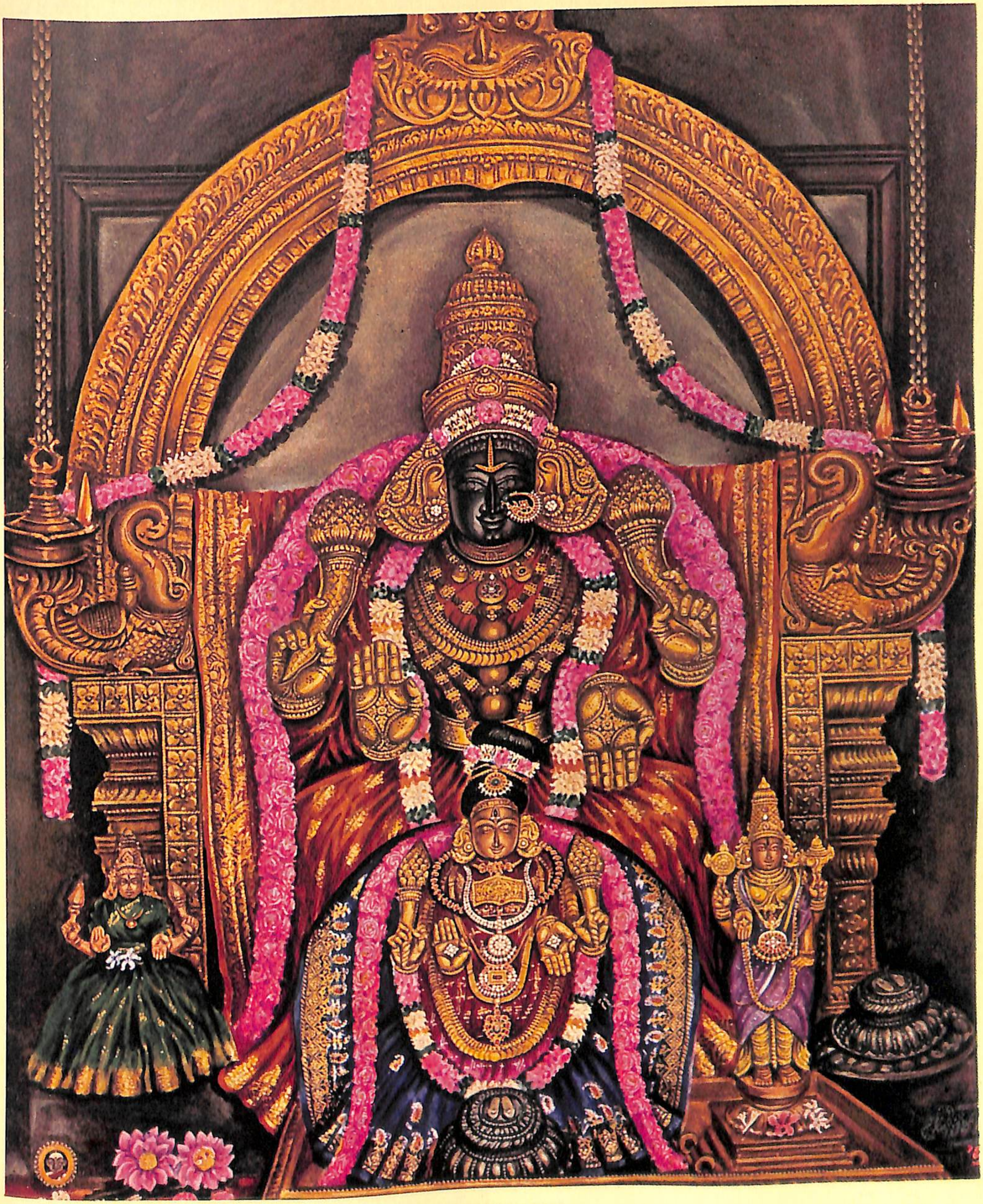
For over 2000 years this temple has been devotionaly patronised by all the ruling families of South India, the Pallavas, Cholas, Pandians, Vijayanagar rulers, Nayakis, Reddies and others. One of the greatest devotee of the Lord was Krishnadevaraya, the Vijayanagar emperor. He endowed the deity with invaluable jewels, treasures, lands etc. A metal portrait of the King and Queen can still be seen inside the temples in addition of the deity. Vaishnavite Alwars — 6th-9th Century, have poured forth soul-stirring hymns on Lord Venkateswara. Annamacharya, the noted composer has several thousand songs in praise of the Lord. These songs were engraved on copper plates and have survived to this day. The saint composer Thyagaraja has sung in praise of this Lord. Arunagininathar has sung *Truppugaz* in praise of Lord Venkateswara.



Sri VENKATESWARA — *Balaji*

Sri PADMAVATHI *(Tiruchanur — Andhra Pradesh)*

Three miles from Tirupathi town in Andhra Pradesh, is Tiruchanur, where the temple of Alarmelu Mangai is situated. She is the consort of Lord Venkatachalapathi. She is also known as *Padmavathi Thayar,* as she is believed to have been born out of a Lotus flower. There is a legend, that soon after the marriage, the Lord and his consort fell out, because of a feud that ensued between them. The spirit of the legend is even today preserved in the form of pooja prevalent in the Shrines. While *Vaikhanasa* form of worship is done for Venkateswara, on the hills, the *Pancharatra* is observed for his consort at the foot of the hills.



Sri PADMAVATHI

Sri VARADARAJASWAMY *(Kanchipuram - Tamil Nadu)*

The temple is situated in Vishnu Kanchi, also known as Little Kanchipuram. The *Moolasthana* is on a little hillock called *Hasthagiri*.

Once Brahma is said to have performed a very big *Yagna,* and during the time of *Poornahuthi* all the Gods and Devas were present there, when Lord Mahavishnu appeared out of the *Yagna Kund*. They requested him to stay there for ever to bless the devotees. He readily acceded to their wish and made *Hastagiri* his abode. He was hailed as the King of boon-givers, *Varadaraja*. He resides in *Punyakotivimanam* by the side of Ananda Pushkarani - the Holy tank.

Ramanuja, the exponent of the *Visishtadvaitha* philosophy of the Hindu Religion, had his education here.

The great work of Krishna Deva Raya, the Vijayanagar King, for the temple, the services rendered by Lakshmikumar Tatacharya, which is continued today by the Tatacharya family, the Shirne of Perundevi Thayar, the paintings of the 108 Vaishnavite Divya Desas and the exquisite beauty of the 100 pillared mandapam, attract the attention of pilgrims. It is recorded that King Achyuta Raya of the Vijayanagar dynasty, was weighed against gold *(Tulabaram),* which was utilised for a grant of houses for the Vedic Pandits who rendered services to the Lord of Hasthangiri.

One of the important temples which is included in the itenerary of pilgrims and tourists throughout the country. *Garuda Sevai* - Procession of the Lord mounted on Garudavahana - is a very popular and colourful festival in this temple during the Tamil month of Vaikasi (May-June).

In the temple tank, an idol of *Varadaraja,* made out of a fig wood *(Atthivaradhan)* lies immersed. Once in 40 years the murthi is taken out and kept on display for devotees benefit for 10 days. Special Pujas are performed during these 10 days.



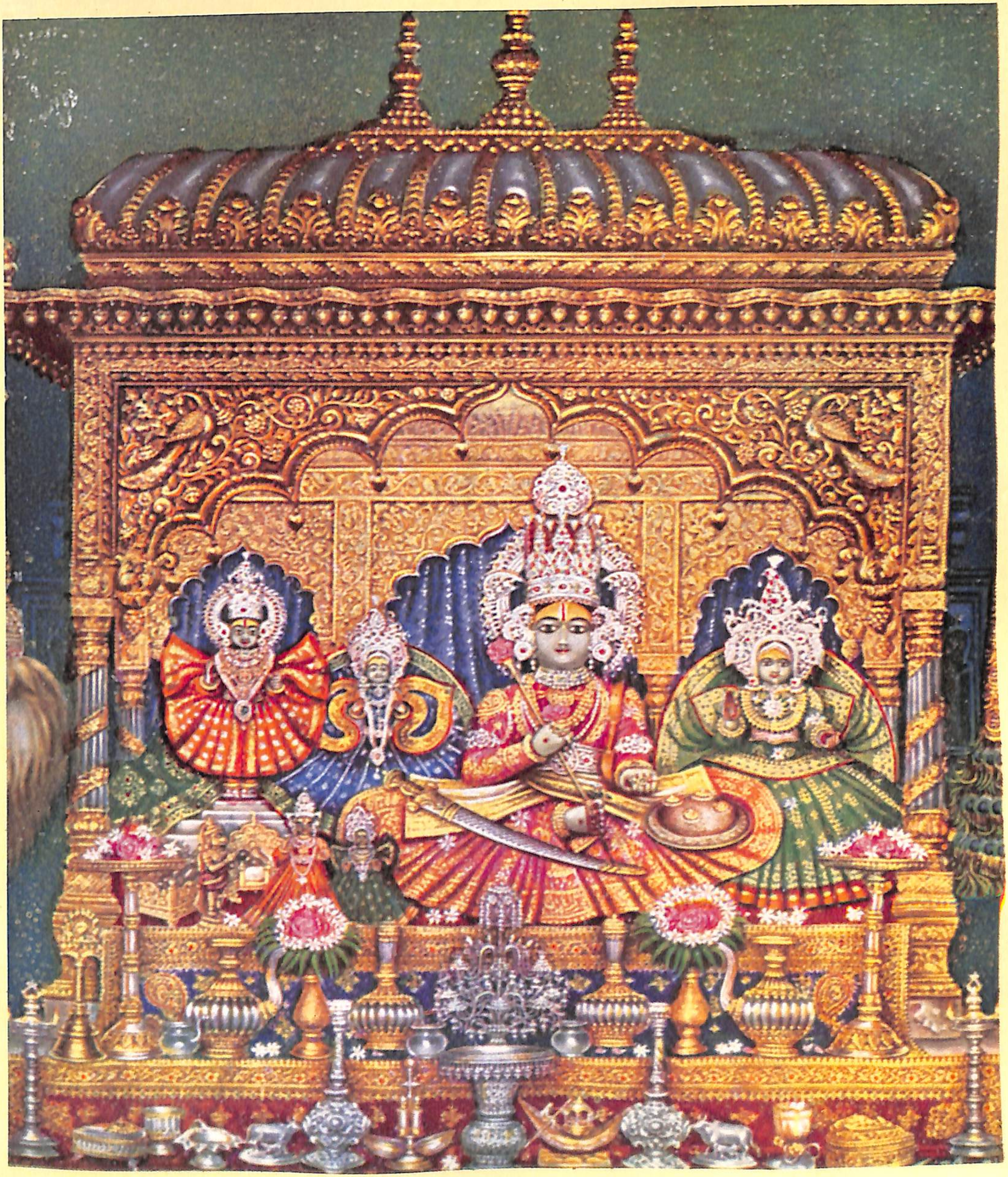
Sri VARADARAJA SWAMY

Sri RAMACHANDRAMURTHI *(Ayodhya - Uttar Pradesh)*

Ayodhya of Ramayana fame, the holy birthplace of Sri Rama is in Faizabad district of Uttar Pradesh, on the banks of the river Sarayu.

It is one of the seven *Mokshapuris*.

There are many temples and places of worship in Ayodhya, besides the importance connected with the life of Sri Rama. The ancient idol of Sri Ramachandramurthi and Sita Devi and Lakshmana have been preserved intact inspite of historical conflicts and are worshipped by millions of devotes of Sri Rama. There are a number of Mutts around this place, belonging to Ramanuja and Ramanandiya schools of *Vaishnava sampradaya.* Sri Rama Navami - the birthday of Sri Rama is the main festival at Ayodhya, which is a noted pilgrim centre for Hindus.



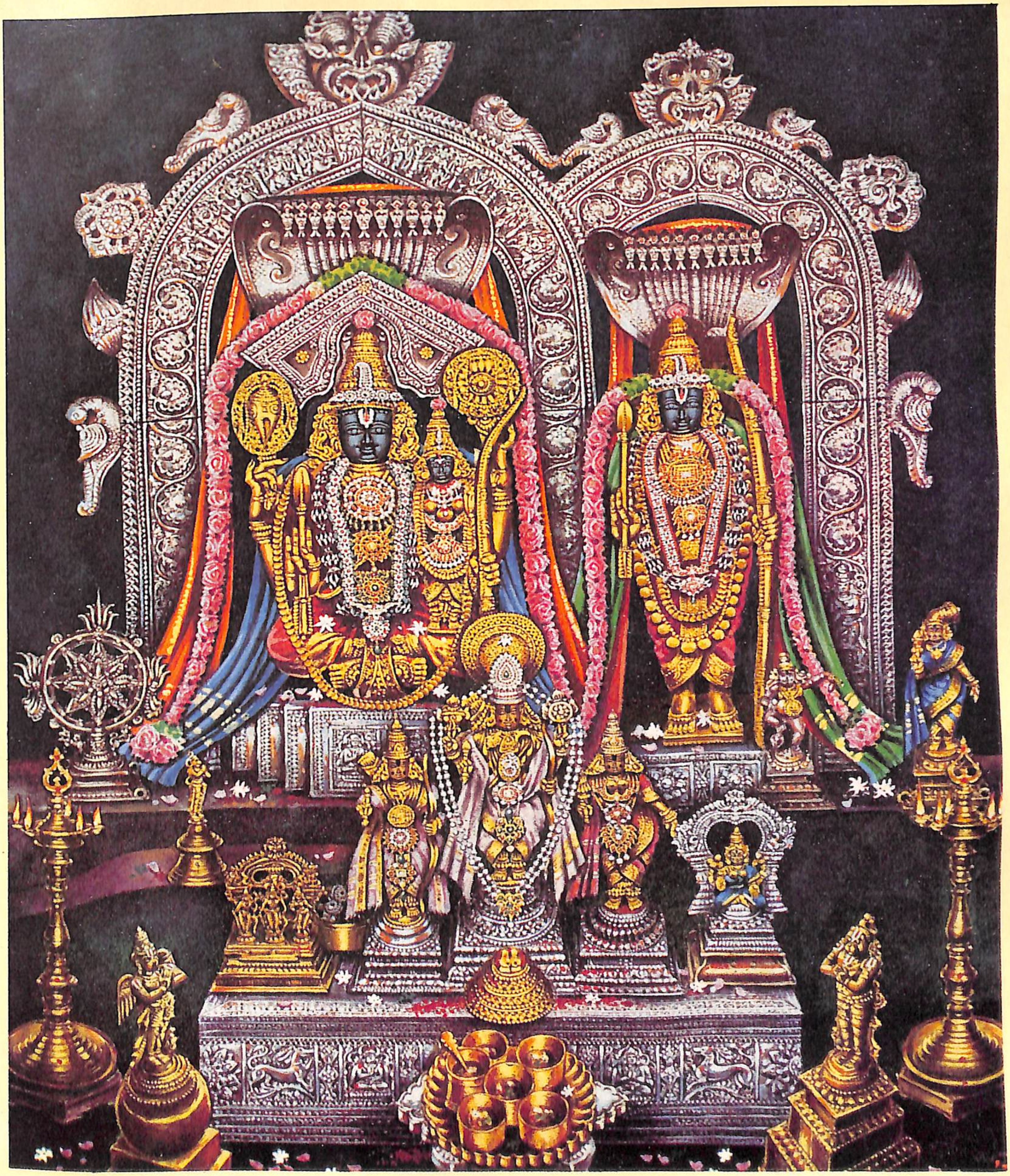
Sri RAMACHANDRAMURTHI

Sri SITARAMACHANDRA *(Bhadrachalam - Andhra Pradesh)*

It is believed that Bhadra, son of Maha Meru did penance for many years in the Dhandakaranya forest, on the banks of the river Godavari. Lord Ramachandra gave darsan to him and in recognition of his devotion fulfilled his wish and made this place His permanent abode with Sita and Lakshmana, to bless devotees who resort to His worship.

This temple, according to tradition was built by a great Rama Bhakta - Ramadas, a thasildar, with Government money. He was imprisoned by the Nawab, for building this temple by appropriation of Government funds, and was kept in a solitary cell in Golconda Fort. Sri Rama came in human form and got him released by paying the money due to the state.

It is one of the important Rama temples of India, situated in Andhra Pradesh. The main deity known as 'Sri Ramachandra' has four hands with Sanku, Chakra, Bow and Arrow. Sita is seated on Rama's lap and Lakshmana is seen standing a distance away.



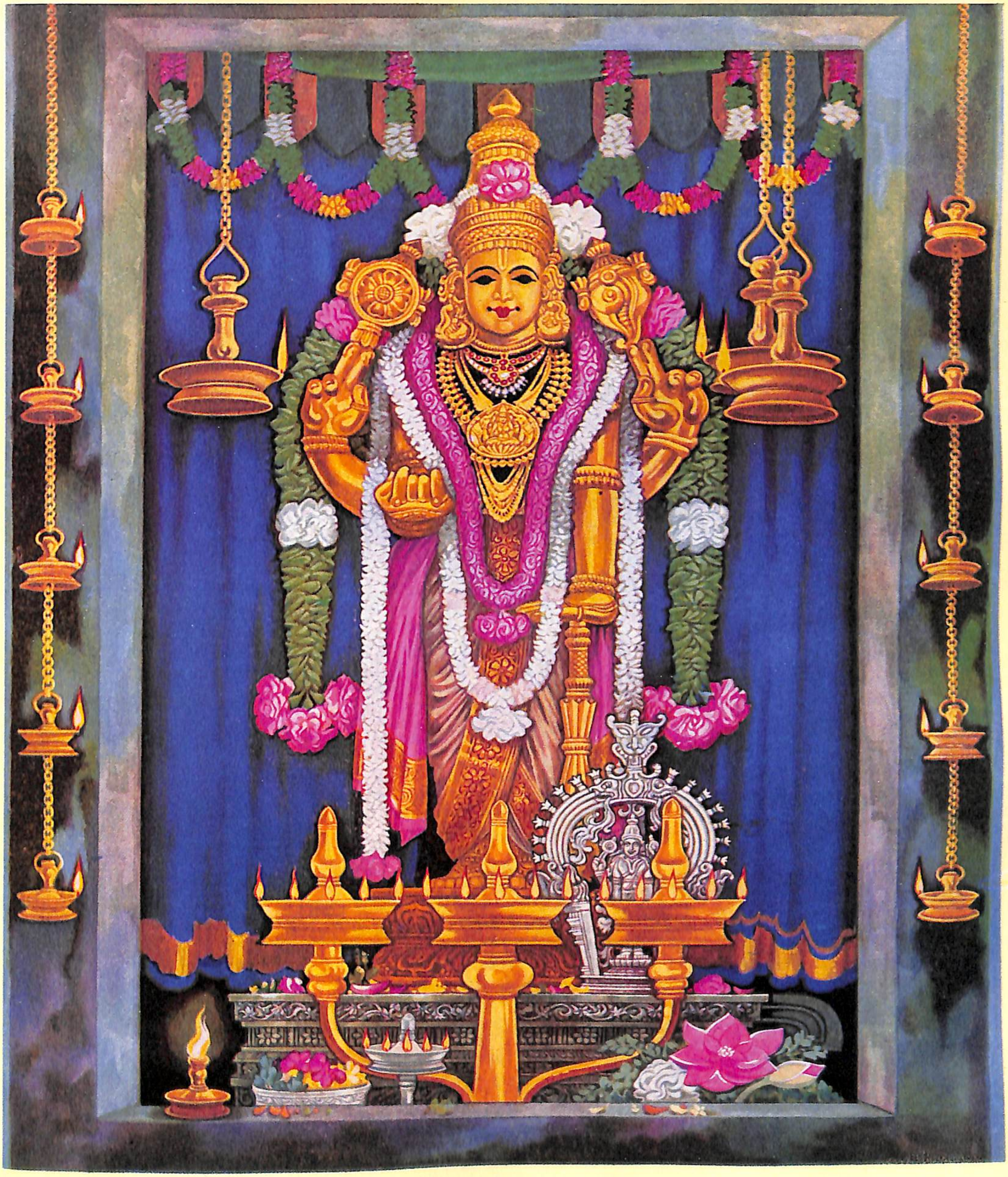
Sri SITARAMACHANDRA — *Bhadrachalam*

Sri JANARDHANA *(Varkala — Kerala)*

Varkala is a small town in Kerala, north of Trivandrum.

The Prajapathis, were cursed by Brahma to be born as human beings, for an offence committed by them. They had to undergo the consequent sufferings to regain their original status after worshipping Lord Narayana. Brahma therefore consecrated Lord Narayana here as *Janardhana* along with Sridevi and Bhudevi. This place was chosen by Sage Narada, by throwing his Vatkalam (bark garment) and the place where it fell is known as Varkala.

The temple is situated on raised ground adjoining the seashore. This is the only major shrine dedicated to Mahavishnu as *Janardhana*.



Sri JANARDHANA — *Varkala*

Sri KRISHNA *(Guruvayur - Kerala)*

Guruvayur is situated in Kerala, 30 kms. from Trichur town.

As per the *Sthalapurana*, a beautiful little idol of Lord Bala Krishna, was said to have been given by Brahma to Lord Vishnu, and kept for personal worship by Sri Krishna at Dwaraka. Just before the deluge of *Dwapara Yuga* when Dwaraka was about to be submerged by the ocean, it was brought here by *Guru* and *Vayu*, the celestial preceptor and the God of wind — in deference to the wishes of Sri Krishna.

The ever-smiling Guruvayurappan showers his benign blessings on the hundreds and thousands of devotees who throng the temple every day seeking His grace. Devotees around this region revere this deity as their *Kuladevata.*

The noteworthy features of the daily routine are (1) Recitation of *Gita Govindam* in the temple (2) Seeveli Procession and (3) a dance form *Krishna Attam,* performed as offering to the deity during nights.

According to tradition Melpathur Narayana Battadri, a scholar and poet of great eminence, who lived four centuries ago, dedicated to the lotus feet of the Lord, the inspired *Narayaneeyam,* verses retelling Bhagavatam in a nutshell in divine presence — and had his rheumatism cured completely.



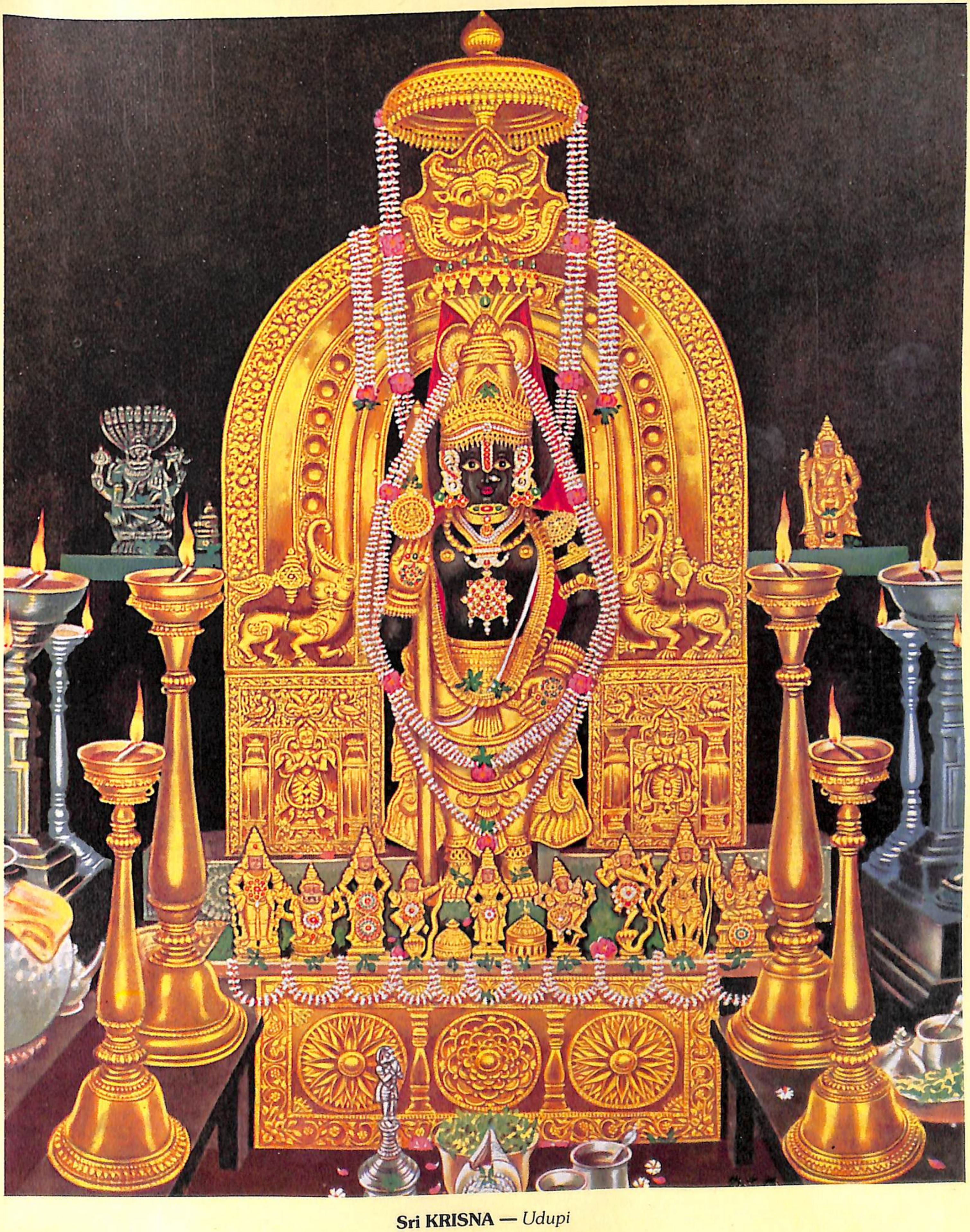
Sri KRISHNA — *Guruvayur*

Sri KRISHNA *(Udupi - Karnataka)*

Two Krishna Temples in South India attract a large number of pilgrims. Both are in the West Coast, a region traditionally known as *Parasurama Kshetra.* One is at Udupi in Karanataka and the other at Guruvayur in Kerala.

Udupi has a long historical background and represent the unique blending of Indian religious and cultural traditions. It is at present the centre of *Dwaitha* Philosophy of Shri Madhavacharya, the propounder of the Dwaitik School with its emphasis on Bhakti. He was born in 1238 A.D. near Udupi. Shri Madhvacharya, a seer and saint, had the Darshan of Sri Krishna. While meditating on the sea shore of Malpe, he saw a ship sinking and brought it to safety. When the ship-owner offered anything to the swamiji for this help, Sri Madhavacharya wanted nothing but the three maunds of *Gopichandra* brought from *Dwaraka* from where the ship started its journey. The maunds were kept in the ship for custody. The first maund contained the image of Balarama while the second contained the image of Dwaraka Krishna. Sri Madhvacharya composed twelve sacred hymns on Sri Krishna known as *'Dwadasa Stotram'*. These slokas contained the philosophy of Bhakti cult. Sri Madhvacharya installed the murti at Udupi facing East in the shrine in the 13th Century A.D. After about 400 years, Kanakadasa, the shepherd saint of Karnataka, apealed to the Lord to give him *Darshan* through the Western window of the temple, as he was precluded from entering the temple. The Lord was attracted by the pure devotion, the idol turned from east to west to give *Darshan* to Kanauadasa and from then on is facing West.

Shri Madhvacharya established eight Mutts around the Shri Krishna Temple here, initiated and appointed eight monks to worship Lord Shri Krishna and propogate the Bhakti cult. Each monk became the head of a mutt and each of them used to worship Shri Krishna for one and a half month in turn, the rotation being called *Paryaya.* From the time of Shri Vadiraja Swami, the period of worship has been extended to two years' Paryayam for each Mutt, which is being continued even to-day. Car festivals including Golden-Car festivals on important occasions, Lakshadeepotsava etc. help devotees to develop their faith and understand the importance of Bhakti cult.



Sri KRISNA — *Udupi*

Sri VITTOBA and Mother RUKHMAI *(Pandharpur — Maharashtra)*

Not even Varanasi, Gaya or Dwarka can surpass the reverence (created by) Pandharpur. This place is variedly described as the spiritual capital or pilgrimage centre of Maharashtra. The traditional *Varkari* pilgrimage, the *padasparsha* darshan as well as the hundreds of *dindis* (group procession) and palanquins that visit the temple on every *Ashadhi* and *Kartiki Ekadashi* have given great significance to the town. This holy place has developed along the River Chandrabhaga in the Solapur District.

The temple complex is indeed very old and has been renovated many times. There is evidence to show that a king from Prathisthana of the Shalivahana dynasty renovated Pandharpur in A.D. 83. The deity is also known as *Panduranga Vittal* or *Pandarinatha*.

Once Lord Narayana, appeared before Pundarika, having been pleased by his devoted sense of duty towards his parents, with a view to bless him. But Pundarika who was engrossed in the service of his parents, who did not want to be disturbed even by the Almighty, placed a brick near by, on which the Lord stood and waited for His devotee to turn his attention to Him. In Marathi language, 'Vit' means brick and 'Uba' means to stand. Hence the name Vitoba. In the temple, he is seen standing on the brick pedestal with both his hands placed on his hips. By his side stands his consort Rukmani Devi in the picture alongside. Gnana Dev, Namdev, Eknath and Thukaram are some of the prominent devotees who have composed inspired hymns on Vittoba.

There are minor temples like Rukmini temple. The greatest devotee of Vithal, Pundalik as his samadhi shikhara on the Mahadwar ghat. There are other important structures such as the Trailokya Nam bhavan, and the Tanpure mandapa in Pandharpur.

The Varkari converge on Pandharpur, chanting and dancing all the way, and present an extremely rich and colourful picture. The dance, music and the prayers appeal to all, and the rhythm is captivating.

The fasting days of *Sukla Ekadasi* (11th day after Moon day) in Ashada and Kritiga months, are important days.



Sri VITTOBHA AND RUKHMAI

SOURAM

NAVAGRAHAS

The Sun rises in the morning and sets in the evening. The Moon rises and fades at a given time. It waxes. It wanes. There are innumerable stars and planets that set and rise. The day changes to night. It is dawn. It is dusk. Season after season comes and goes. There is summer. There is Winter, Spring and Monsoon. It rains only in time. A sudden earthquake shatters a Nation. Dry spell brings calamity to the people. Floods ravage cities and villages. A man dies at a particular time. A child is born next door at the same time. Every action according to time. This is the role of the *Navagrahas,* manifested by God, to function as the time - keepers of the universe, its people, an individual and every living being in the Universe - To bestow benefits to the man and correct him by penalties - each according to his past and present actions. Human beings come into existence, by the encasing of *Jivas* (life-factors) into different media, bodies according to the qualifications of each. These qualifications, known *Samskaras* are acquired by the respective Jivas, depending upon their actions in the past, in accordance with or against the ordained way of life of the *Dharma-sastras,* moral code prescribed by the creator. The indelible impressions left on the *Jiva* therefrom is called *karma.* The created human beings are expected to lead a life ordained by the *Smritis* and *Srutis,* (the Vedas and Dharma sastras). Deviation from the ordained path results in pain and misery, to get relief from which propititation of the planets is suggested in the scriptures.
Hence the practice of *Navagraha Shanti,* Puja, Homam, Japa, and the like, frequently resorted to.

Each of the *Navagrahas* has a manifested form and effect on the humans and cosmos, and derives its potency from Sun God. In our solar system the planets have movement and occupy different positions in the zodiac (called houses) at different times of the year, when different experiences are had not only by us in our day-to-day lives, but even nations.

The importance given to these *Navagrahas* can be seen from the fact that there are temples dedicated to each one of the *grahas* in Thanjavur Dist., Tamil Nadu. These temples are said to be the *Navagraha Khestras* to Lord Mahalingerwara, at *Madhyarjunam* Tiruvidaimarudur. These temples are:

1. Suryanarkoil	- Surya	4. Tiruvenkadu	- Budha	7. Tirunallar	- Saturn\
2. Tiruvarur	- Chandra	5. Alangudi	- Guru	8. Tirunakeswaram	- Rahu
3. Vaidhiswarankoil	- Angaraka	6. Kanjanur	- Sukra	9. Naganatharkoil	- Kethu

There are *Navagraha* shrines in every temple, for the benefit of the devotee as also for the Nation..
There are also other temples whose prime deity is considered as *yajamana* of a particular planet like.

- Moon Tirupathi
- Mars Pazhani
- Mercury Madurai
- Jupiter Tiruchendur
- Venus Srirangam
- Rahu-Ketu Kalahasthi

SURYA *(SUN)*

He is the God — a living God — whom everyone can see, perceive and pray. Though he is visible, he also has been presented in a variety of forms, He is the life-giver, light-giver and time-giver.

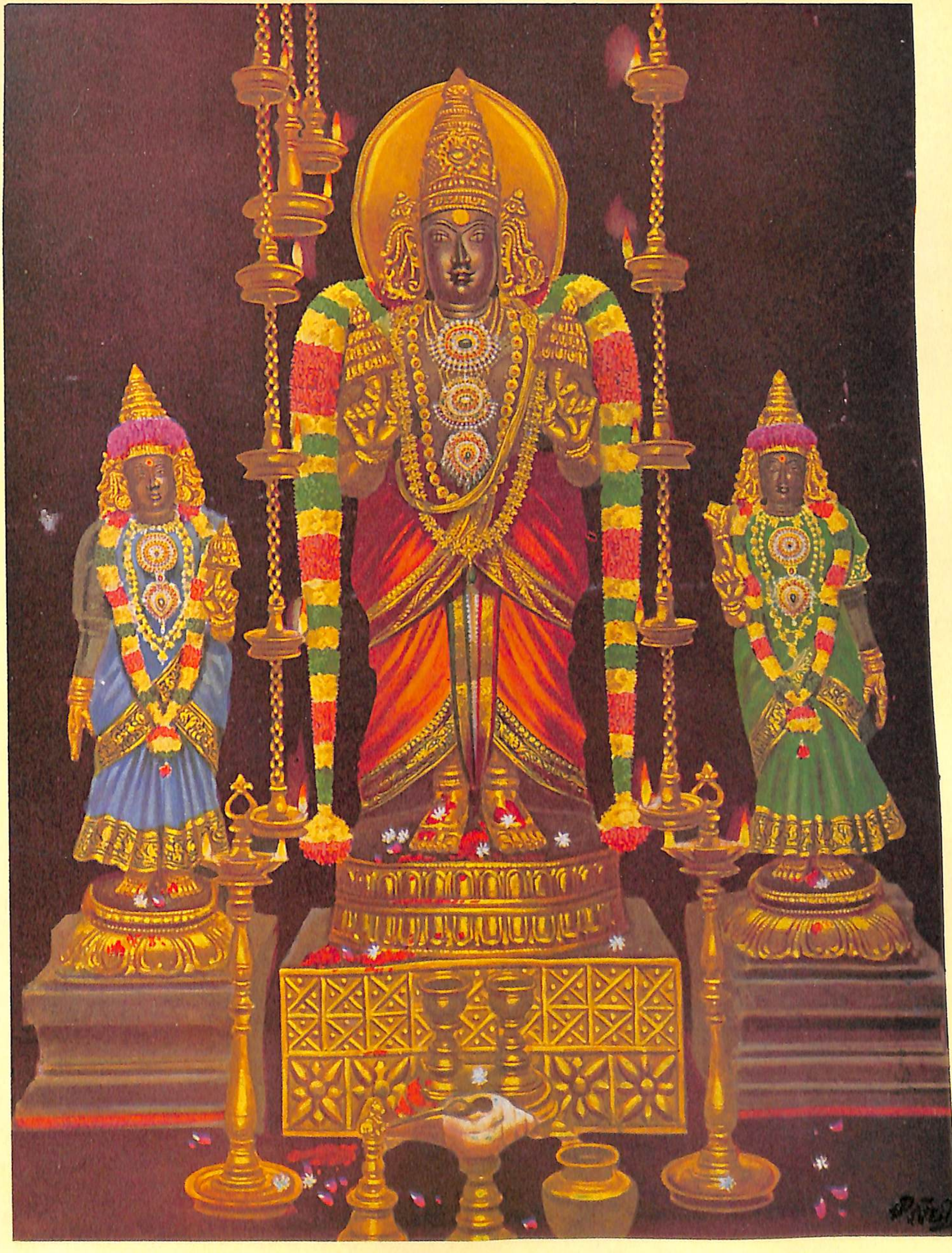
In the six cults established by Adi Sankara, *Souram* is one devoted to Sun God. Even in other religions, Sun worship has a place.

In the Zodiac, he occupies a prominent place — the Centre. This griha is the source of life and He is therefore described as the life-giver *(Pranadhata).* He helps one to gain his eyesight and Suryanamaskara (worship by prostration) will strengthen the bones, cure illness, however severe it may be, cleanses the devotee from his sins and bestows on him progeny, wealth, good-health and long-life. He is the cause for rain-fall benefiting the world. The *Vedas* adore him as a witness for all actions *(Sakshi).* Worship of this devata on Sundays is supposed to bring in manifold benefits to the worshipper.

He is the Lord of Leo in the Zodiac. He stays 1 month in each Rasi and takes 365 days or 12 months to complete a round of the 12 Rasis.

SURYANARAYANA *Suryanarayana Temple - Tamil Nadu*

Suryanarayana Temple, popularly known as Suryanar-Koil, is about 3 kms from Aduturai railway station on the main line (Southern Railway) from Madras to Thanjavur. There are also temples to Sun at Konark in Orissa and Modhera in Gujarat.



Sri SURYANARAYANA

CHANDRA *(MOON)*

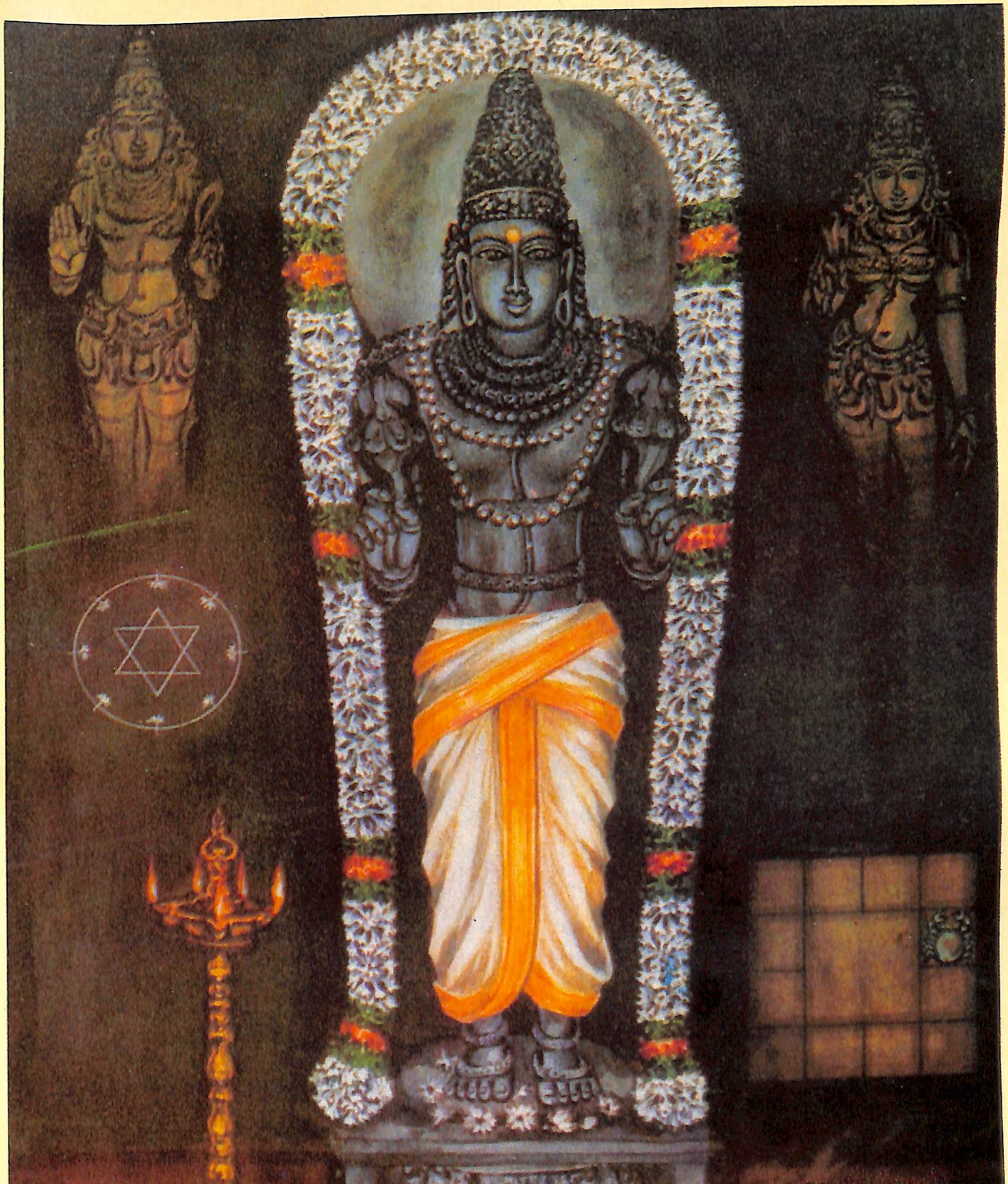
A lovable God -- A loving god. Pleasing to children as well as elders. Universally appealing to everyone whatever may be the religion of the onlooker. Sages and devotees invoke the Goddess Mother in *Chandra* and meditate for hours.

This *griha (Moon)* causes nightfall, strengthens the mind, purifies the blood and is considered as the mother who radiates nectar *(Amrut).*

Worship of this griha is said to be beneficial for relief from all sorrows, helps in curing mental afflictions, T.B. etc. His cool rays radiate happiness alround. He adores the head of Lord Siva.

Worshipping *Chandra* on Mondays is said to be very effective in getting one's prayers answered.

In the Zodiac, he is the lord of *Cancer.* He stays 2 1\4 days in each Rasi, completing a round of the 12 Rasis in 27 days.



CHANDRA

ANGARAKA *(MARS)*

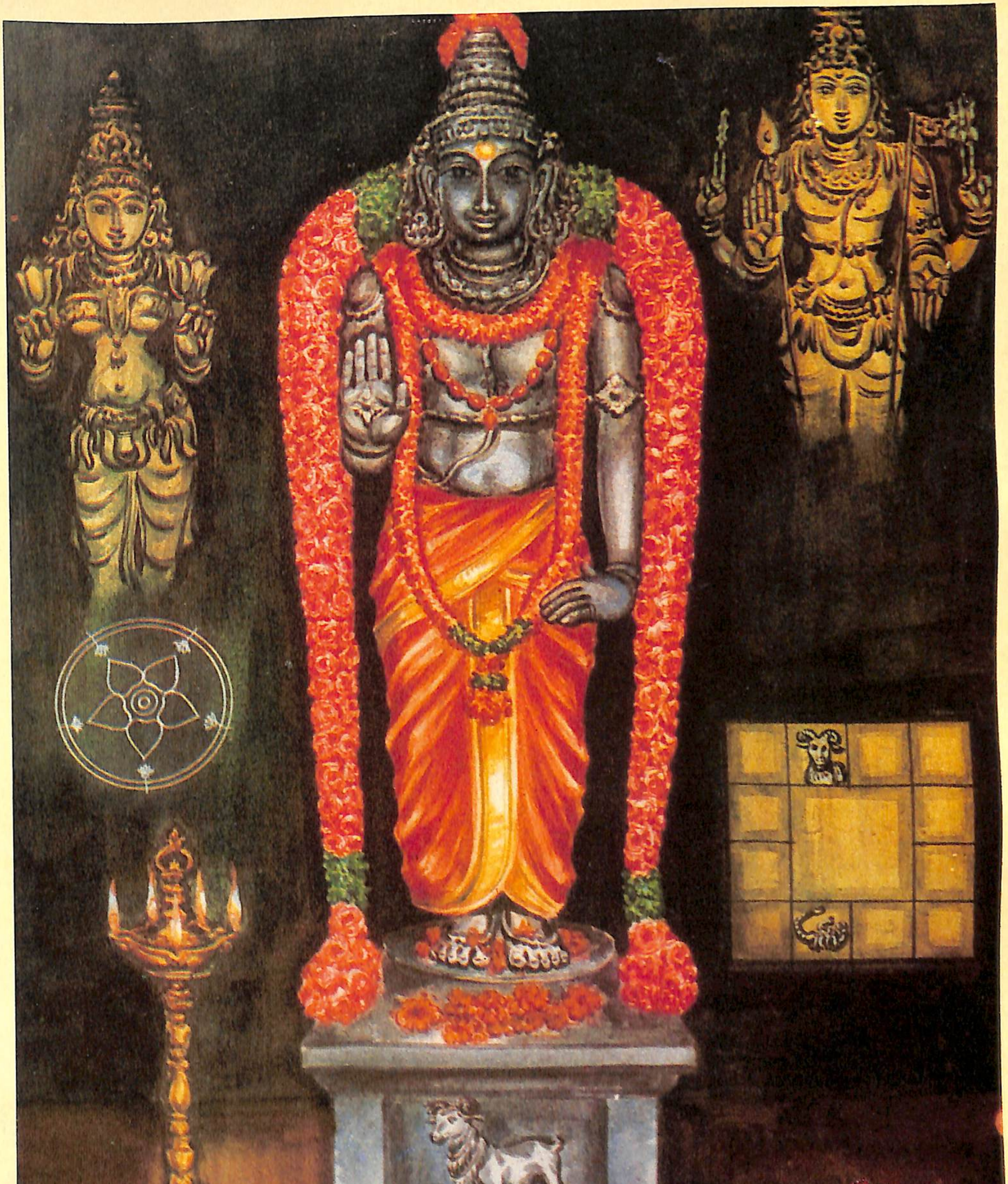
In the Zodiac, he is regarded as a God of martial character, red in every aspect. Even the Romans held him as their *Guru*.

A prayer to this planet frees one from debts, poverty and illness afflicting the skin. The devotee will get a noble lady as his consort and a son who will bring name and fame to the family. This *griha* bestows property and conveyance (Locomotion). Loss of eyesight can be restored by a prayer to Angaraka.

Tuesdays are intended for the worship of *Angaraka,* who loves the chanting of *Sama Veda*.

In the Zodiac, He is the Lord of 'Mesha' and 'Vrischika'. He stays 1 1\2 months in each Rasi, taking 18 months to complete the cycle.

He has a separate shrine at *Vaitheeswaran Koil* in Tamil Nadu.



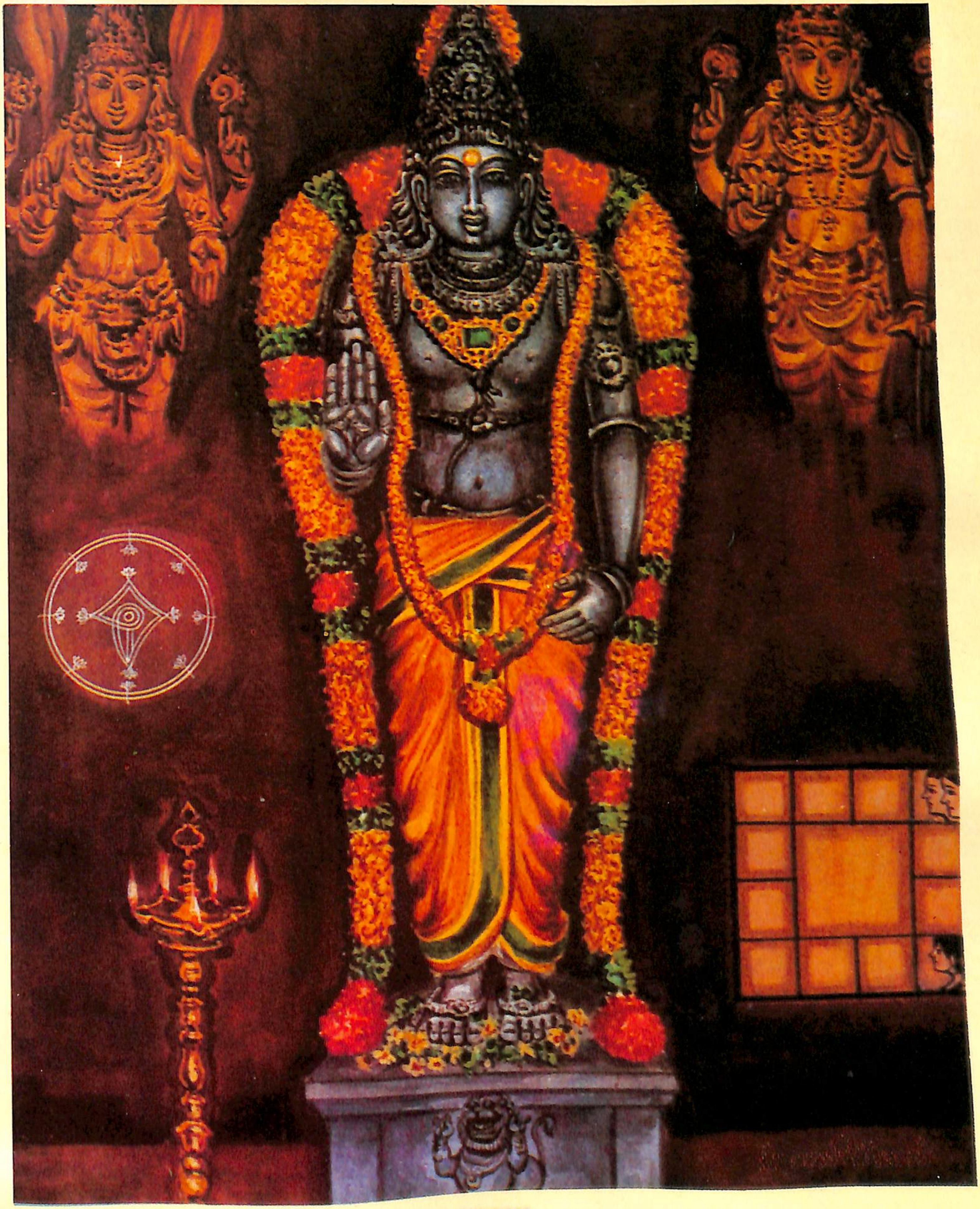
ANGARAKA

BUDHA *(MERCURY)*

Considered as the greatest among the wise, this Devata bestows wisdom and wealth etc. on his devotees. He removes evil thoughts from their minds. He is the chief among *Gnanis* (Realised souls). He is considered Vishnu Rupi, because of his beauty and resemblence.

A prayer to Him, especially on Wednesdays brings in manifold benefits like removal of all obstacles, helps one to get a progeny, possession of fertile lands etc.

In the Zodiac this devata is the Lord of *Mithuna* and *Kanya*. He stays like the Sun, one month in each *Rasi*, completes the cycle in 12 months, more or less closely in the footsteps of the Sun.



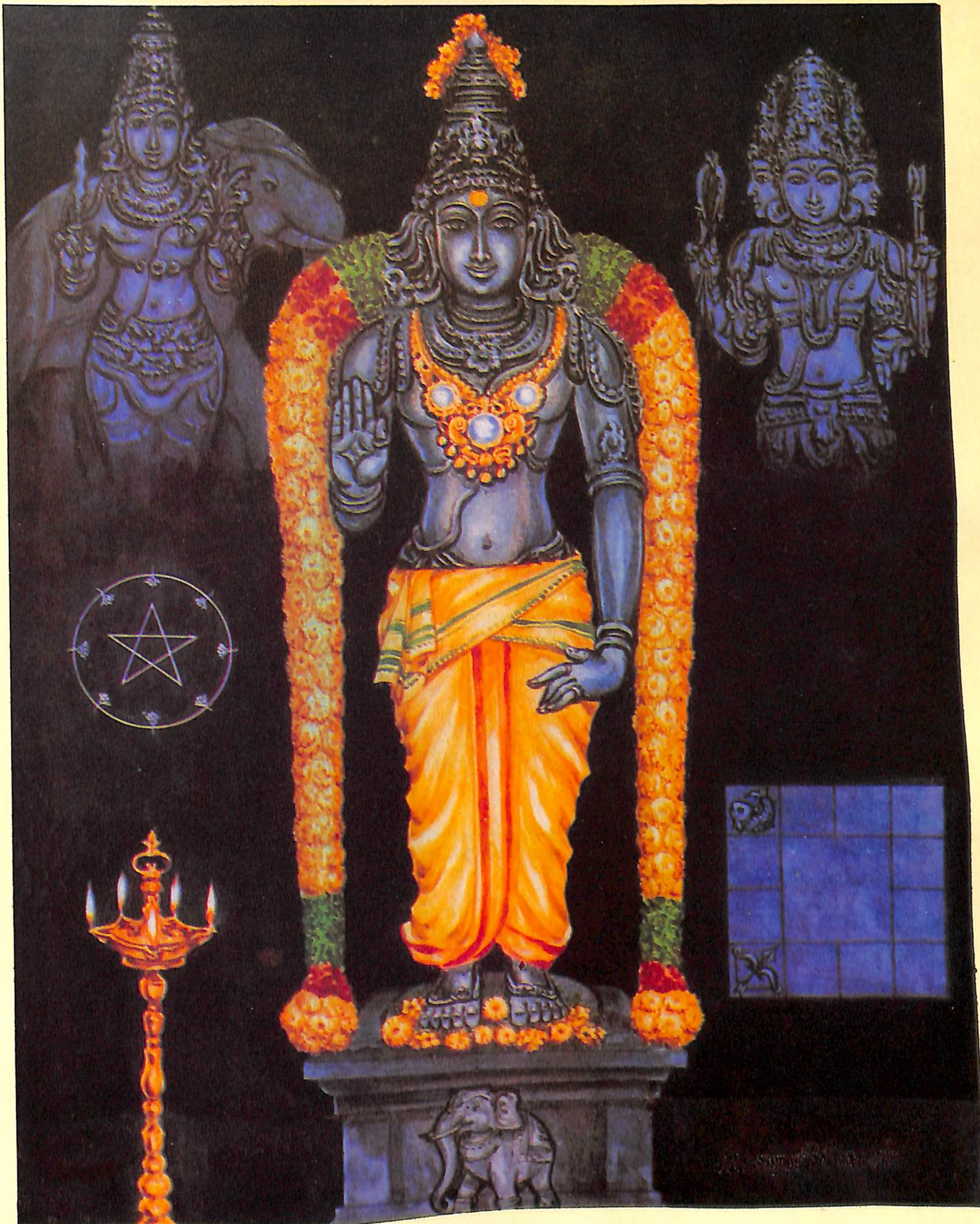
BUDHA

BRIHASPATHI - GURU *(JUPITER)*

Worship of this Devata results in a cure from ailments affecting the stomach and helps one to ward off his sins, helps him in gaining strength, valour, longevity etc. He grants the boon of father-hood to the childless, good education (Vidya). He is revered as the *Guru* of Devas, protector of the world and is a *Sreshta* among the wise. Kind-hearted, he is considered the *Loka Guru* and dispenser of justice and can be known only by a proper study of the Vedas.

Thursdays are considered to be the best day for the worship of Jupiter.

In the Zodiac, He is the Lord of *Dhanus* and *Meena.* Guru stays for one year in each *Rasi,* taking 12 years to complete the cycle.

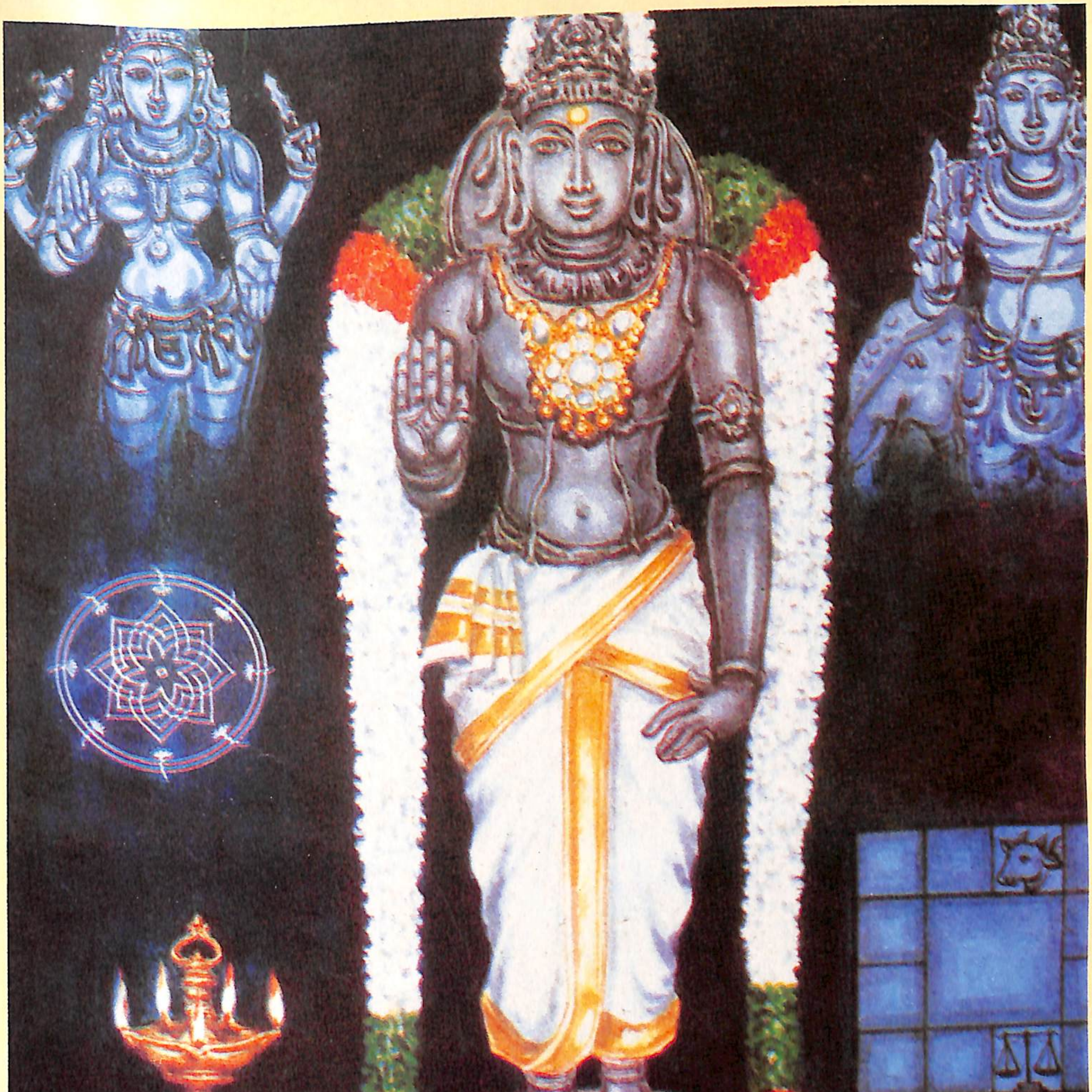


BRIHASPATHI

SUKRA *(VENUS)*

Sukra is the bestower of long life, wealth, happiness, children, property and good education. He is the Guru for *Asuras.* Well learned in *Neeti Sastras* follower of such sastras and one who dispenses justice, Sukra is considered a beneficial devata. He blesses the devotees with power to control one's *Indriyas* (Sense organs) and enables the devotee to obtain fame and name. Fridays are considered to be effective for the worship of Sukra.

In the Zodiac, he is the Lord of *Tula.* Sukra takes one year to complete the Zodiac cycle living one month in each *Rasi.*



SUKRA

SANISCHARA *(Saturn)*

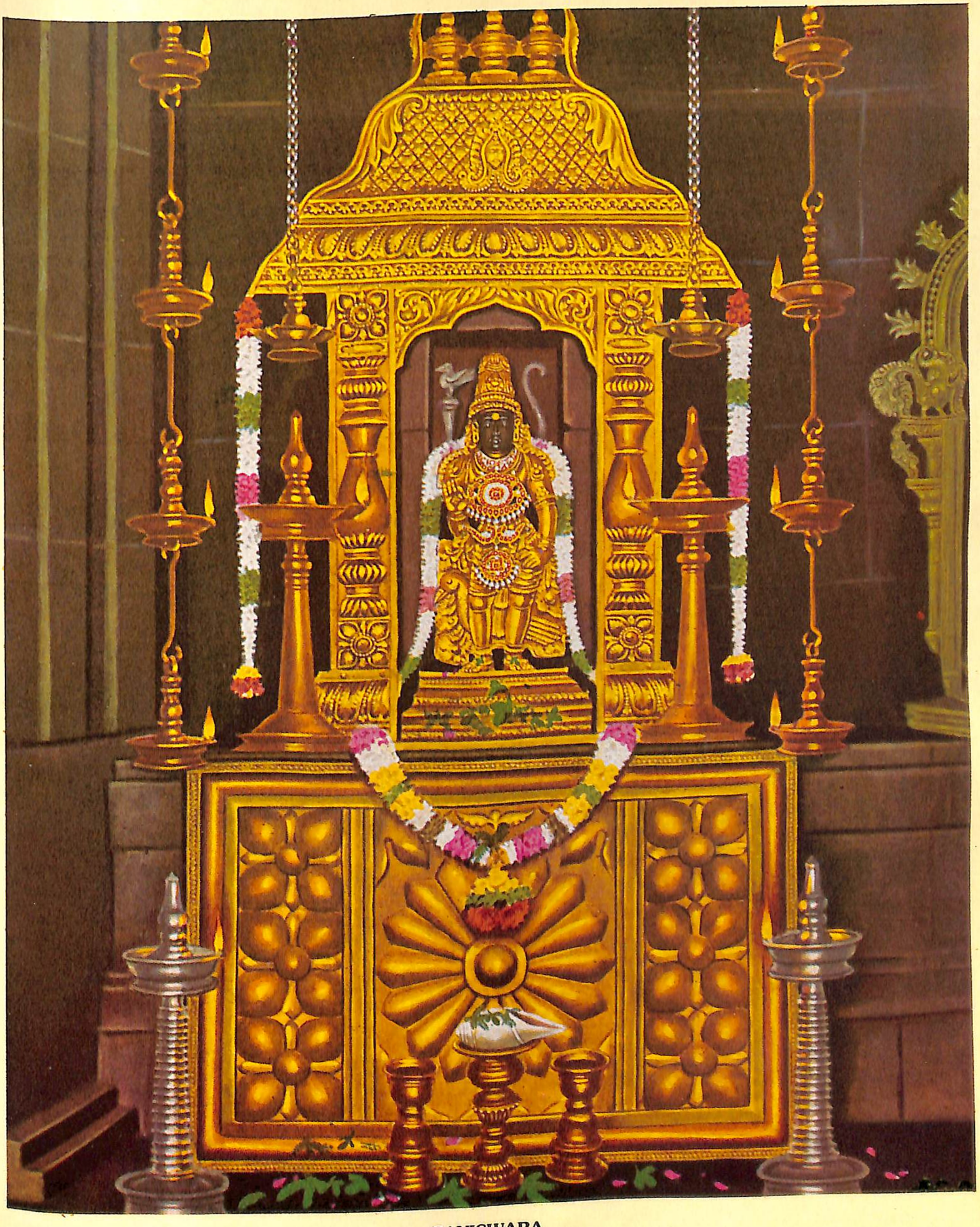
This griha, also known as Manda, is generally known to affect one adversely on occasions when he occupies different positions in one's horoscope like *Saade Sati* (7 $\frac{1}{2}$ years) *Ashtama Sani* (Saturn in the 8th house - 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ years) etc. A prayer to this Devata, especially on Saturdays, is said to mitigate the hardships one will have to face during these periods.

Presentation *(Daana)* of Til Seed, Iron-utensil and black cloth, and the repetition of *Sanischara* stotram a number of times will help the devotee in warding off the effect arising out of the affliction by this planet.

Sanischara is considered equally a bestower of all benefits to the devotees who pray sincerely to him.

He is the Lord of *Makaram* and *Kumbam*. He is the slowest moving planet taking 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ years in each Rasi, completing one cycle every 30 years.

Exclusive Temples exist for *Sanischara* at *Thirunallar* in Tamil Nadu. And also at *Naydongri* in Maharashtra.

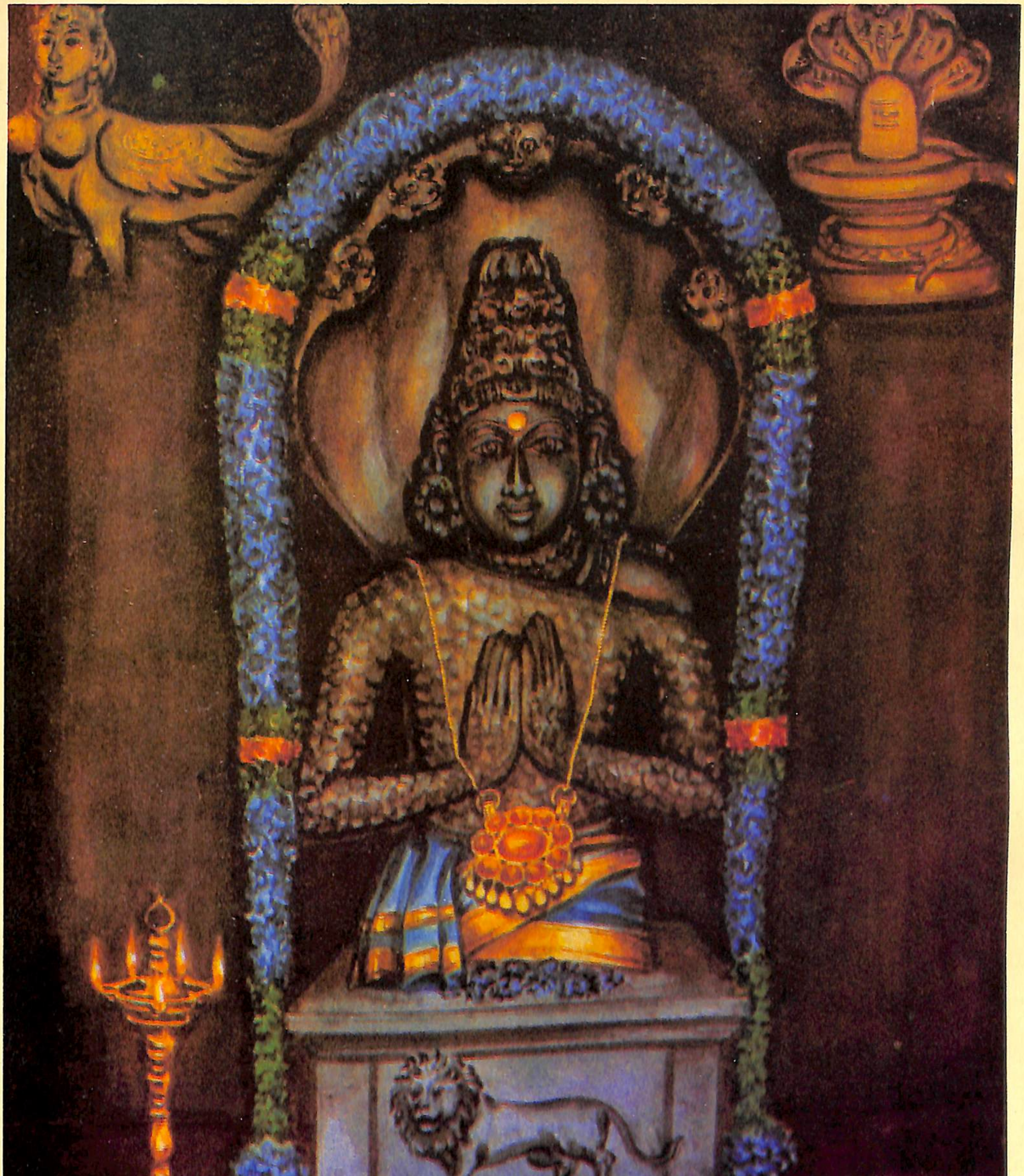


SANISWARA

RAHU

The *Skanda Purana* says that Rahu is instrumental in strengthening one's power and converting even an enemy into a friend. The effect of snake bite is removed by his grace. The lunar and solar eclipses are attributed to Rahu and Kethu.

Rahu and Ketu stay 1 1\2 years in each griha.

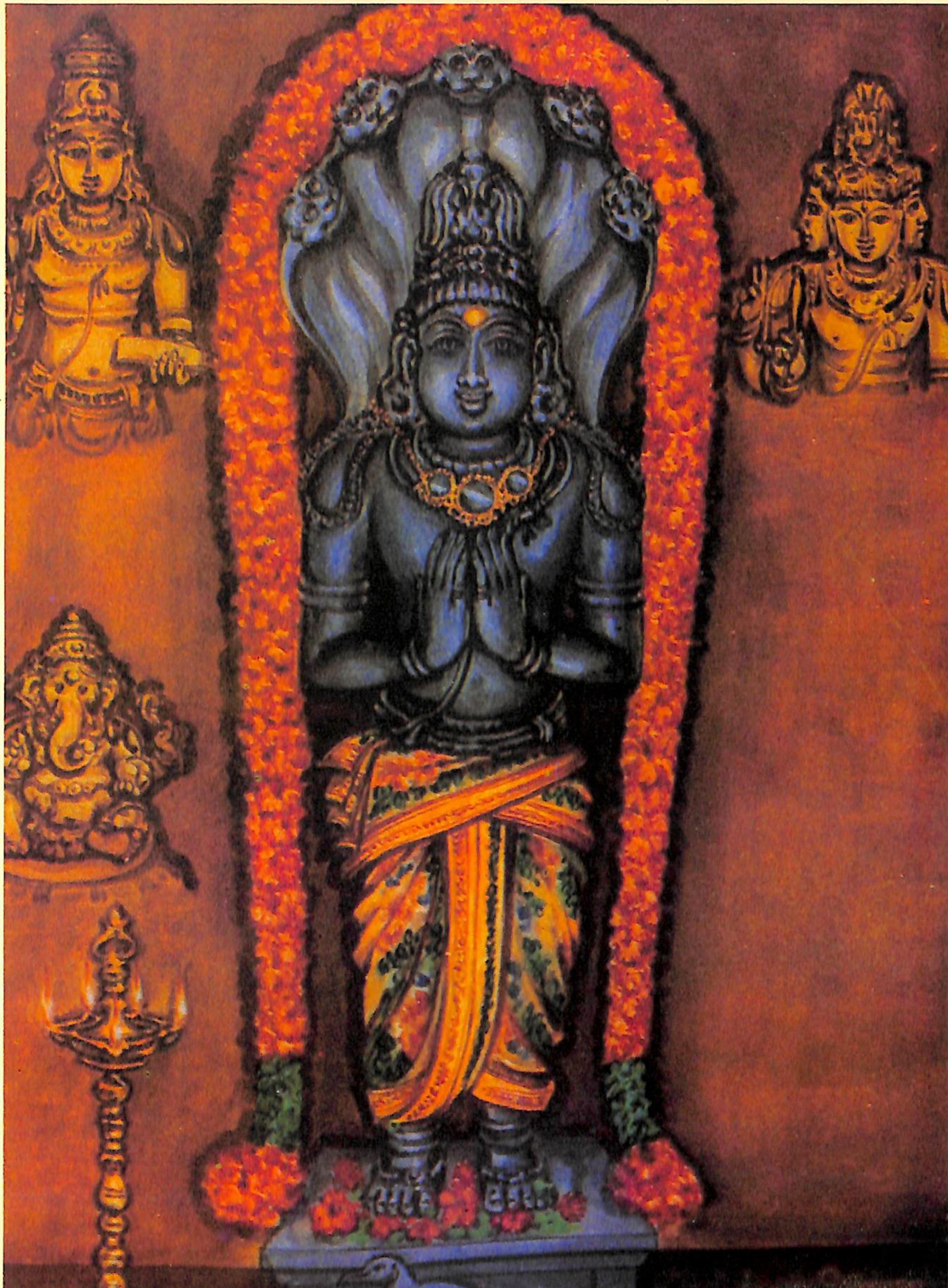


RAHU

KETHU

Kethu brings prosperity to the devotee's family, removes the effect of snakebite and illness arising out of poisonous matter entering one's body. He grants good health, wealth, cattle and alround prosperity.

Lunar and solar eclipses are said to occur because of Rahu and Kethu.



KETHU